SIX LITTLE BUNKERS at CAPTAIN BEN'S

LAURA LEE HOPE

A Happy Birthday 50¢

To Irma From Alice
Rutherford

10/1/27

LADDIE AND VI WERE BEING TAKEN OUT ON THE BROAD BAY.

Six Little Bunkers at Captain Ben's *Frontispiece*—(*Page* 159)

SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT CAPTAIN BEN'S

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

AUTHOR OF "SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT GRANDMA BELL'S," "SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT AUNT JO'S," "SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT UNCLE FRED'S," ETC.

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(Nine Titles)

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Six Little Bunkers at Captain Ben's

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SIX LITTLE BUNKERS AT CAPTAIN BEN'S

CHAPTER I

THE SMOKING CHIMNEY

"ONE, two, three, four, five, six!"

Russ Bunker counted thus, pointing his finger at five children in turn, until he reached himself, when he stooped down and turned a somersault on the floor of the attic.

"Oh, look at Russ!" cried Rose, the sister nearest him in age. "How funny he did it!"

"What made you do it, Russ?" asked Violet, or Vi as she was called for short. "What made you flop over that way? Did it hurt your head? Did you get any splinters in your hands? Did you——"

"Say! Hold on a minute! Wait!" cried Russ, with a laugh, as Vi stood with her mouth open all ready to ask another question. "If we're going to play the steamboat game I can't answer all those questions."

"Are you going to play the steamboat game?" cried Vi, jumping up and down so that her curly hair bobbed back and forth in and out of her grey eyes. "Oh, what fun! But please tell me, Russ, what made you count us all that way, as if we were going to play tag? And what made you flop over, and what——"

"There you go again with your questions!" interrupted Russ, with another laugh. "You can't seem to stop, Vi. You don't give any one else a chance."

"And I know a nice riddle I can ask, too," broke in Laddie, who was his sister Violet's twin. "I know a riddle about what makes the paper stick on the wall and if it falls off——"

"I asked first!" broke in Vi. "Just tell me what made you count us all out just as if we were going to play tag, Russ, and then what made you do a flop-over. Tell me that, and then we'll play the steamboat game."

"All right, I'll answer just those questions and no more," promised Russ. "Then we'll have some fun. I counted you all out—one, two, three, four, five—six—that's me—because I wanted to see if we were all here."

As there were six little Bunkers, it was

sometimes needful to count them, one by one, to make sure all were on hand. This was what Russ had done.

"And I turned a somersault when I came to myself, just because I felt so good," the dark-haired boy went on with a merry whistle. "Come on, we'll play the steamboat game now. Rose, you please get out the spinning wheel, and Margy and Mun Bun, you bring over the littlest footstools. Don't bring the big ones, 'cause they're too heavy for you."

"Shall we sit on 'em footstools?" asked Mun Bun, as he shook his golden hair out of his blue eyes.

"Yes, you sit on one footstool and Margy can sit on the other," said Russ. "Now, don't both of you try to sit on the same one, or there'll be a fuss, and we'll never get to playing. Can you bring the spinning wheel all alone, Rose?"

"Yes, it isn't heavy," answered Rose, the oldest girl of the six little Bunkers. "It drags over the floor easy." And as she pulled to the middle of the attic, from the dark corner where it had stood all summer, a big, old-fashioned spinning wheel, Rose hummed a little song.

She generally was humming or singing, when she was not helping her mother in the housework. For where there were so many children, there were more matters to attend to than Mrs. Bunker, Norah, the Irish cook, or Jerry Simms, the odd-chore man, could well look after, and Rose was glad to aid. She was a regular little "mother's helper," and her father often called her that.

So while Rose brought over the spinning wheel and Margy and Mun Bun the footstools, Laddie and Violet appealed to their older brother.

"I want to do something!" complained Vi.

"So do I," added Laddie. "If I don't do something I'm goin' to think up another riddle. I know one about——"

"No, you don't!" cried Russ, with a laugh. "No more riddles until we get the steamboat started. Here, you bring over some of the bigger footstools, Laddie. And Vi can help you. Now we're all working—all six of us;" and as Russ spoke he began dragging out of the corners of the attic some chairs and light boards, with which he intended to build the "steamboat."

Of course it was not a regular vessel, nor did it sail on water. In fact, there was no water in the attic of the house where the six little Bunkers lived. There was no water even when it rained, for the roof had no holes in it, and the attic made a lovely place for the children to play.

It was not raining now, and, if they had wished, the children could have had fun out in the yard. But they had just returned from a jolly vacation spent in the open on Uncle Fred's ranch in the West, and perhaps they felt that to play indoors would be a welcome change. They were as brown as berries from having been so much out in the sun and the wind.

"All aboard! All aboard the steamboat!" called Russ, when the boards, chairs, footstools, spinning wheel and other things had been put in place near the center of the attic. "All aboard! Toot! Toot! Don't anybody fall into the water! Hand me that bundle, Rose, please," said Russ to his sister nearest him in age.

"Has it got life preservers in it?" asked Violet. "If it has, can I put one on, and will

you let me make believe fall in the water, Russ? And will you pull me out, and——"

"There you go again! As bad as ever!" laughed Russ. "No, these aren't life preservers! They're sugar cookies, and I got them for us to eat on the steamboat! All aboard! Toot! Toot!"

"Oh, sugar cookies! I'm glad!" cried Mun Bun. "I likes sugar cookies, don't you, Margy?" he asked, as he sat close to his little sister on the footstool.

"I 'ikes any kind," she lisped, a form of talk she had not altogether gotten over since her "baby" days.

"Here we go!" cried Russ at last, and he took his place in a chair in front of the big spinning wheel, the package of cookies beside him. The spinning wheel was the only part of the "steamboat" that really moved. It could be turned around in either direction, and was almost as large, and almost the same shape, as the big steering wheel on the big, real steamers. Of course it had no "spokes" on the outer rim to take hold of, but Russ did not need them. The spinning wheel was an old one that had belonged to Mrs. Bunker's great-

grandmother, and though the children were allowed to play with it they were always told they must be very careful not to break it. And I must do them the credit to say that they were, nearly always, very careful.

"All aboard!" called Russ again, just as he had often heard the men on real boats say it. "Don't anybody fall off."

"I don't want to fall off till I gets my cookie," remarked Mun Bun.

"And if we fall we don't have to fall as far as Russ does, 'cause he's so high up on a chair and we're low down, on little stools," added Margy.

"That's so!" laughed Russ, as he twisted the spinning wheel around, to make believe steer the steamboat out into the middle of the pretend river.

Of course the steamboat did not move at all. It just remained in one place on the attic floor. But the six little Bunkers did not mind that. They pretended that they were steaming along, and, every once in a while, Russ would toot the whistle, or give some order such as might be given on a real boat.

"When are we goin' to eat?" asked Laddie,

after a time, during which the boat had made make-believe stops at London, Paris and Asbury Park. "Can't I have a sugar cookie, Russ?"

"Yes, I guess it's time to eat now," agreed the older boy.

"Whoa, then!" cried Laddie.

"What are you saying 'whoa' for?" demanded Russ, looking around.

"'Cause I want the steamboat to stop," answered Laddie. "It jiggles so—make believe, you know—I'm afraid I'll drop my sugar cookie in the water."

"You mustn't say 'whoa' on a boat!" went on Russ.

"Laddie was thinking he was out on Uncle Frank's ranch, riding a cow pony, I guess," said Rose. "That's why he said 'whoa'; didn't you, Laddie?"

"I guess so," answered the little fellow. "And I know a riddle about a cow. Why is it that a brown cow eats green grass that makes white milk and turns into yellow butter?"

"That isn't a riddle—it's just something funny. And, besides, you've said that before," said Rose.

"Well, anyhow, can't I have a sugar cookie?" asked Laddie. "And we'll make believe the steamboat has stopped, and we can pretend we're on a picnic."

"All right," agreed Russ, as he gave the spinning wheel a few more turns. "I'll bank the fires—that means I'll turn 'em off so they won't get so hot—and we'll go ashore."

"All ashore!" yelled Laddie.

"Is they enough sugar cookies for all of us?" asked Mun Bun, as he and Margy arose from the low stools where they had been sitting.

"Oh, yes, plenty," Russ answered. "I asked Norah to put a lot of 'em in a bag and I guess she did. Here, Rose, you can pass 'em around, and I'll tie the steamboat fast."

"Do you have to tie it same as Uncle Fred tied his cow ponies?" asked Vi.

"Pretty near the same," her biggest brother answered. "And after a while we'll——"

Russ stopped suddenly and looked at his sister Rose. She had just passed some of the cookies to Mun Bun and Margy, and was getting ready to hand one each to Laddie and Vi, when she saw something that made her point

to the big brick chimney which passed through the roof in the middle of the attic.

"Look! Look!" exclaimed Rose.

"What's the matter?" asked Russ.

"The chimney! It's smoking!" went on Rose.

"That's what chimbleys is for," said Laddie. "I know a funny riddle about smoke in a chimbley and——"

"But the smoke from the chimney shouldn't come out into the *room* or the *attic,*" interrupted Rose. "I can smell it, and I can see it! Oh, Russ!" she cried.

"Yes, you can see it and smell it!" agreed Russ. As he spoke quite a puff of thick smoke came into the attic. It seemed to spurt right out of the side of the chimney, at a place where some bricks were rather loose and had large cracks between them.

"Oh, Russ!" cried Rose. "Maybe the house is on fire!"

CHAPTER II

THE CLIMBING MAN

ALMOST as soon as she had spoken these words, Rose wished she had not. For looks of fear came over the faces of Mun Bun and Margy, and Laddie and Vi, though a little older, also acted as if frightened. And yet Rose had spoken what was in her mind. The smoke poured out into the attic through a hole in the chimney. It was getting thicker and more murky, and Mun Bun began to cough.

"Is there a fire?" asked Violet.

"Yes, I think so," answered Rose. And then it came to her mind that she must not frighten the smaller children, so she quickly added: "But I guess it's only a little fire. Maybe Norah is burning up papers in the stove and they smoke. I heard her tell mother there was a lot of trash to be burned since we came back from Uncle Fred's ranch."

"Well, she must be burnin' a awful lot!" exclaimed Laddie, and he choked as he swallowed a mouthful of smoke.

Just then a larger cloud of it seemed to pour out into the attic, and from outside the home of the six little Bunkers, and from the rooms below them, came shouts and exclamations.

"Oh, Russ!" exclaimed Rose, looking at her older brother, "something is the matter, I'm sure!"

"I guess there is," he agreed, as he ran to a window. "I'll let some of the smoke out and then——"

He suddenly ceased speaking as he looked to the street below. To the ears of the other children, playing in the attic, came a loud clatter and clang.

"Is it the puffers?" asked Mun Bun, meaning the fire apparatus.

"Yes, the engines are all out in front of our house!" cried Russ. "We'd better get down out of here. It's too far to jump!"

"Don't dare jump!" screamed Rose. "Come on, Russ. You take Vi and Laddie and I'll look after Mun Bun and Margy." And she caught the two youngest children by their

hands and Russ did the same for the twins, Vi and Laddie.

The smoke continued to grow thicker in the attic, and the cloud of it was now so dense that the chimney itself, whence the choking fumes came, could scarcely be seen.

But under the leadership of Russ and Rose the four smaller children were being led to safety, and while this is going on I shall take the chance to tell some of my new readers something of the other books in this series, as well as about the six boys and girls who are to have a part in this story.

Six was the number of the little Bunkers. That is, there was an even half dozen of them. Russ, aged nine years, was a great whistler and a lad who was often engaged in making toys, or building something, like make-believe steamboats or engines, to amuse his smaller brothers and sisters.

Next to Russ was Rose, a year younger. As I have told you, she was a great help to her mother—a girl of cheerful, sunny disposition, always making the best of everything.

Next came Violet and Laddie. They each had curly hair and gray eyes, and were twins.

As you have noticed Vi was a great one for asking questions. It did not seem to matter to her what she asked questions about, nor how many, as long as she could keep some one busy answering them, or trying to answer. For not always could answers be found to Vi's questions. Laddie, her twin brother, had a different curious habit. He was always asking riddles—at least he called them riddles, though some of them were as funny as Vi's questions.

Last of all in the half dozen little Bunkers were Margy and Mun Bun. Margy's real name was Margaret, and the complete name of her small brother was Munroe Ford Bunker.

Now that we have finished with the children we will start on the grown-ups of the family. Daddy Bunker's name was Charles, and he was in the real estate business in Pineville, Pennsylvania. Mother Bunker's name was Amy, and before her marriage she was Miss Amy Bell.

Then there was Norah O'Grady, the good-natured cook, and Jerry Simms, an old soldier who could tell fine stories about the time he fought in battle. Of course Norah and Jerry were not real Bunkers—that is, they were not

members of the family. But they had been in the home of our friends so long that the children began to think of these two kind servants as almost some of their own relatives.

There were enough other relatives in the Bunker family, too. There was Grandma Bell, and the first book of this series is named "Six Little Bunkers at Grandma Bell's." After some glorious days at their grandmother's, the six little Bunkers went to Aunt Jo's, next to Cousin Tom's, after that to Grandpa Ford's, and then they went out West to a ranch. The story of their trip there, and what they did, is set down in the volume just before this one. It is called "Six Little Bunkers at Uncle Fred's," and Russ, Rose, and the others had not long returned from this enjoyable visit before they began a new series of adventures.

The first of them I have already started to relate to you. It is about the fire, or at least the smoke, in the attic where they had been playing steamboat.

"Russ!" exclaimed Rose, as she made her way through the smoke-filled room to the stairs, leading Mun Bun and Margy, while her oldest brother followed with Vi and Laddie,

"oh, Russ!" went on Rose, "you didn't start any fire in the make-believe boiler of the pretend steamboat, did you?"

"Course—course not!" answered Russ, somewhat choking over the words, for some smoke got down his throat. "I never play with matches!"

"Well, there's a fire somewhere!" declared Rose.

"Maybe it's across the street," suggested Russ, "and the smoke just blew in the windows." But, even as he spoke, he looked over his shoulder and saw smoke pouring out of a place in the attic chimney where some bricks were broken loose and large cracks showed.

"It's our chimney that's on fire, all right," said Russ to himself. "It's the first fire we ever had. I want to see the engines work and squirt water!"

Down the attic stairs to the second floor went the six little Bunkers. There was very little smoke on the second floor, and as Russ and Rose were leading the four smaller ones toward the head of the stairs they were met by their mother and Norah rushing up, each of them out of breath and much excited.

"Oh, children! are you all right?" gasped Mrs. Bunker. "I have been so frightened. You're all right, aren't you? Not hurt or burned?"

"We're all right, Mother!" Russ hastened to say.

"Is our house on fire?" demanded Vi. Even in this excitement she could not forget to ask a question.

"Yes, darlin', the house is burnin'!" cried Norah. "Oh, sorrow the day I should live to see this. Oh, come to Norah, little darlin's!" and she tried to gather in her arms all four of the smallest children at once.

"Don't frighten them!" called Mrs. Bunker, as she caught up Mun Bun in one arm, and Margy in the other. "The house isn't exactly on fire, children. It's just the chimney. A lot of soot got in while we were at Uncle Fred's, and it is the soot which is now burning."

"But I heard a fireman say if the chimney fire wasn't soon put out it might set the house afire!" declared Norah, as all of them started down the front stairs.

There was plenty of excitement now in the home of the six little Bunkers. Outside could

be heard the whistle of a fire engine and the shouts of many men and boys.

Russ, Rose, the other four children and Mrs. Bunker and Norah safely reached the first floor. There was no smoke at all here, as yet. As Russ hurried out on the porch he saw Jerry Simms running around holding the garden hose, out of the nozzle of which trickled a little stream of water.

"Let me get at it!" cried the old soldier, who acted as gardener and furnace man by turns. "Let me get at the blaze! I'll put the fire out if I can see it!"

"You won't put much of a blaze out with that stream!" exclaimed a fireman in a rubber coat, as he hurried up the steps. "There isn't enough force to it."

"Oh, I forgot to turn the water on full!" said Jerry Simms. "Wait a minute. I'll go turn it on full force, and then I'll put out the blaze," he said, putting the hose down on the porch and hurrying to the faucet which came through the foundation wall of the house.

"That won't be any good for this fire, no matter how much force of water you have," cried the fireman. "The fire's down inside the

chimney, and we can't get at it until we climb up on the roof and stick a hose down the flue."

"Is that what you are going to do?" asked Mrs. Bunker, who was not frightened, now that she knew her children were safe.

"Yes, we want to get up on the roof so we can turn a hose down the chimney," the fireman answered. "But we can't get up!"

"Why not?" asked Russ, who stood near his mother on the porch, while the yard and the street around the house were rapidly filling with people.

"Our ladder isn't long enough," the fireman answered. "We had a long ladder, but it is broken, and without it we can't get up on the roof to pull up a hose and squirt water down the chimney."

"But something must be done!" cried Mrs. Bunker. "The more the chimney fire burns, the hotter it will get, and it may set the whole house ablaze before long. Something must be done!"

"Yes'm," agreed the fireman. "We're trying to do something. We got two engines pumping, and the men are on the ground trying to shoot the water up in the air and let

some of it fall down the chimney hole. But they aren't having very good luck. I came to see if you had a long ladder."

"Oh, a long ladder!" cried the mother of the six little Bunkers. "You had better ask Jerry Simms."

"If he's the old man running around with the garden hose, it won't do much good to ask him," said the fireman with a smile. "He is so excited he hardly knows what he is doing."

"Here comes Jerry now; ask him," suggested Mrs. Bunker again, while Norah stood holding to Mun Bun, Laddie, Margy and Violet—at least she was trying to hold them, though, every now and again, one of the children would break away and run to the front fence to watch the puffing engines.

"Have you a long ladder—one that will reach to the roof—so we can climb up and pull a hose to the chimney top?" asked the fireman, while the wind blew a swirl of black smoke around those on the porch.

"A long ladder? Oh, I don't know—I—oh, good land! I turned the water off instead of on," cried Jerry, as he looked at the nozzle of the garden hose which he had laid down on

the porch. Not even a trickle was coming from it now.

"Never mind that! Get us a ladder!" cried the fireman. "Ours is broken, and if we don't douse this chimney pretty soon there'll be a bad blaze."

"What is it you want?" cried a man, making his way to the stoop through a crowd of people in the yard around the Bunker house. "What's the trouble? Why don't somebody get on the roof with a hose?"

"Because we have no ladder long enough to reach there!" the fireman answered. "If only somebody could climb up he might——"

"Get me a piece of clothesline, and I'll climb up!" cried the man, taking off his coat. And as Mrs. Bunker turned to look more closely at him she gave a cry of surprise.

"Oh, Captain Ben!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker.

CHAPTER III

THE INVITATION

"Oh, ho! So you know me then, do you?" cried the man who had so suddenly and unexpectedly appeared and offered to climb to the roof of the house where the chimney was on fire.

"Yes, I know you by your picture," answered Mrs. Bunker. "But I never expected to see you so soon. Where did you come from?"

"No time to talk now—excuse me—got to hustle as I did in the army in France!" was the answer. "I'll tell you all about it later. Now, if you'll get me a clothesline, I'll climb to the roof and put out the chimney fire!"

"You can't put out a fire with a clothesline, can you?" asked Violet. "Don't you need a hose?"

"Yes, little girl. I don't know what your

name is, but I'll find out later," said the man who had been called "Captain Ben" by Mrs. Bunker. "What I want the clothesline for is to carry it up to the roof with me. I can't take a hose, but I can tie the rope around my waist, climb up, and then the fireman can tie the end of the hose to the line. Then I can haul up the hose, the fireman can turn on the water, I'll squirt the water down the blazing chimney, and the fire will soon be out."

"Oh!" exclaimed Vi. She very seldom had such a long answer given to any of the questions she asked. "Oh," she said again.

"Where's a clothesline?" cried Captain Ben.

"I'll get you one," offered Norah, and she rushed around to the side yard, coming back in a few seconds with a long, trailing length of line she had cut from the posts. Meanwhile more and more black smoke was coming from the chimney, and some was drifting out of the attic window Russ had opened.

"Good! Thank you!" exclaimed Captain Ben.

"Do you think the house is catching fire?" asked Mrs. Bunker of the chief of the department, who came up on the porch just then.

"Not yet; but it may soon," he answered. "What are we going to do?" he went on. "We have no ladder to get to the roof, and——"

"This gentlemen is going to climb up to the roof for us," interrupted the fireman who had been talking to Mrs. Bunker. He pointed to Captain Ben, who was making some loops in the clothesline that Norah had brought him.

"How's he going to get to the top of the high roof of this house when we can't get up ourselves without long ladders?" asked the fire chief. "And our long ladder is broken. How are you going to get up, if I may ask?" he inquired of Captain Ben.

"You don't need to ask one of Uncle Sam's soldier-sailors a question like that," was the answer. "I was one of the marines in the late war, and doing hard things is just what the marines like. I'll show you how I'm going to get up to the roof without a ladder. Be ready to bend on the hose when I give the word."

"We'll be all ready," the fire chief promised. "I'm ashamed of our department for not being able to put out a simple chimney fire before this, but I didn't know our long ladder was broken. That makes all the trouble."

"The trouble will soon be over when I get up there!" declared the young soldier with a look at Russ, Rose, and the other little Bunkers. They all wondered who he was and how it was their mother knew him from having seen his picture. Not even Russ, the oldest, remembered any relative named Captain Ben.

"Now we're all ready!" exclaimed the former marine, as he had called himself. "We'll have this fire out in no time!"

He seemed to know just what to do, and even the fire chief was waiting for Captain Ben. With the clothesline tied around his shoulders in a knot that could quickly be loosed, the stranger ran to a large copper rain pipe fastened to the side of the house. Near the rain pipe, or leader, as it is called, was also a lightning rod, and there was a strong ivy vine growing and climbing up a wire trellis which was nailed on the wall of the house.

"Up I go!" cried Captain Ben, and in another moment he was going up the side of the house, climbing hand over hand by means of the lightning rod, the copper leader, and the vine. None of these, alone, would have been strong enough to have held him, but by using

all three together the soldier-sailor managed to get up to the roof.

The roof of the Bunker house, where the blazing chimney came through, was a peaked one, though it was not of a very sleep slant. Russ wondered how Captain Ben was going to climb this peak, which was like a hill, only covered with shingles. But the sailor had on low shoes with rubber soles, and these did not let him slip. Stooping down, and helping himself along with his hands when he reached the roof, Captain Ben made his way close to the chimney.

From it now could be seen coming flames and sparks as well as smoke, and it began to look as though the whole house might soon be ablaze.

"Fasten on the hose!" suddenly called Captain Ben.

On the ground below firemen made fast to the lower end of the clothesline the length of hose from which the water had been turned off.

"If their hose isn't enough I'll let 'em have mine," said Jerry Simms, who now had the water turned full on in the garden line. And

he was so excited that, before he knew it, he had sent a shower of spray up on the porch.

"Mind what you're doing, Jerry!" called Norah. "Be easy now!"

"Oh, excuse me!" begged the old soldier. "I'm so excited I don't know at all what I'm doing!"

He turned the hose aside, but this time he sprayed the fire chief and one of his men. But as they had on rubber coats and rubber boots, as well as thick helmets, they did not mind the water in the least and only laughed.

By this time other firemen had fastened an empty line of hose to the end of the clothesline. The other end of the rope was held by Captain Ben on the roof of the Bunker home, and now he began hauling up.

"I have it!" he cried as he reached the nozzle, and took off the clothesline. "Wait until I get close to the chimney, and then turn on the water."

"All right!" the chief answered.

Captain Ben, in his rubber-soled shoes that did not slip on the shingle roof, crawled over until he was close to the blazing chimney. It was low enough for him to point the hose right

down in it, and when he had done this he shouted:

"Turn on the water!"

"Turn on the water!" echoed the chief. The hose, that was almost like a big snake trying to climb up the side of the house of the six little Bunkers, straightened out and twisted as the water filled it, being pumped in by one of the engines.

Captain Ben directed the stream down the blazing chimney. There were puffs of steam, the white clouds of which mingled with the black smoke of the chimney, and the water poured down into the kitchen, spurting out of the range where the fire had been built. The water put out the fire in the stove, as well as the fire in the chimney, and made muddy puddles on Norah's kitchen floor. But this could not be helped. It was better to have a little water in the house than a lot of fire.

"How are you making out?" the chief called up to Captain Ben on the roof.

"Fine!" was the answer. "The fire is almost out!"

And it was all out a minute or two later. Then the water was shut off, so that the house

would not be flooded, and Captain Ben dropped the hose from the roof down to the ground.

"Is he going to jump down, Mother?" asked Vi, who, with the others of the family, stood in the side yard, where they could all get a view of the roof on which stood Captain Ben.

"No, indeed, he will not jump down!" said Mrs. Bunker.

"I guess he'll climb down the same way he went up—like a monkey," said Laddie. "He's a good climber. Some day I'm going to climb up to the roof like Captain Ben did. But who is he, Mother? Is he what Uncle Fred is to us?"

"Not exactly," was the answer. "I'll tell you about Captain Ben a little later when there isn't so much excitement. He is coming down now, and I must thank him for what he did."

"I want to thank him, too," said the fire chief. "I'd never have thought of getting to the roof that way. But it's a good thing he did, or that chimney might be burning yet."

Captain Ben made his way down the vine, the lightning rod, and the copper pipe as he had gone up. Several in the crowd gathered

about him, and many told him he had done just the right thing. But Captain Ben paid little attention to these strangers. He made his way to where Mrs. Bunker stood with the six little Bunkers gathered about her.

"I didn't expect my visit would have so much excitement connected with it," he said, with a smile, as he put on his coat. "But I arrived just about the same time as did the engines. I saw what the trouble was, and decided that was the best way to help."

"I am glad you did," remarked Mrs. Bunker. "Though I have not seen you for several years, I knew you at once by your picture, which I recently saw in the paper. You evidently got safely back from the war."

"Yes, I got nothing worse than a few scratches. But, unless I am much mistaken, here comes Mr. Bunker."

"Oh, here's Daddy!" cried Rose, as a very much excited man rushed up the front walk, pushing his way in among the throng that had been attracted by the alarm of fire.

"Are you all right? Is anyone hurt? How did it happen? Is the fire out?" asked Daddy Bunker, and, really, he asked almost as many

questions as Violet would have done had she had the chance.

"Yes, we are all safe!" answered Mrs. Bunker. "No one hurt and very little damage done. But I have a surprise for you! Look!" and she stepped from in front of the marine who had put out the blazing chimney.

"Captain Ben!" cried Daddy Bunker. "Where in the world did you come from?"

"Just back from the war," was the answer, as Captain Ben shook hands with Daddy Bunker. "I'm going to take a long rest, and I came to bring an invitation to you—to you and the six little Bunkers," he went on, looking from one of the children to the other.

"An invitation!" cried Rose.

"Yes, and I do hope you will accept," said Captain Ben. "The summer is not quite over," he went on to Mr. and Mrs. Bunker, "and I'm sure these youngsters will be all the better for some more vacation. Let's go in, away from the crowd, and I'll explain about my invitation."

And each and every one of the six little Bunkers wondered what was going to happen.

CHAPTER IV

ANOTHER VACATION

CAPTAIN BEN, as both Daddy and Mother Bunker had called him, caught up in his arms Mun Bun and Margy. He was so big and strong that the children seemed feathers to him, and he easily held them both on one arm. Then he reached down his other hand and took the two hands of Laddie and Vi in his.

"Now come on!" cried Captain Ben, laughing. "I have four of the half dozen little Bunkers, and the other two can hang on my coat tails. Let's go in and have a nice talk and visit."

"Yes! Yes!" cried Mun Bun and Margy and Laddie and Violet.

"Where are we going and what are you going to tell us?" asked Vi, not forgetting, even in all the excitement about the fire, to

ask her usual questions. "What are we going to do?"

"Oh, you'll find plenty to do—all six of you —if you come to my seashore place!" laughed Captain Ben. "That's what I came especially to talk about," he went on to Daddy and Mother Bunker. "I want to get out of my mind all thoughts of the great war, and if I can have this happy bunch of children around me it will be the best thing in the world. You'll let them come, and you'll come with them, won't you?" he asked, as he stood on the door sill.

"We just got back from Uncle Fred's!" answered Mr. Bunker. "I don't see how we can give the children another vacation so soon after they have just finished one. But I do want to have you pay us a long visit, Captain Ben. And we'll go in, as you say, and talk. But I must first make sure that the fire is out. Some one telephoned to me at the office that my house was burning up. I ran out, hailed the first man I saw in an auto, and he brought me here flying. I can't tell you how glad I was when I saw the house still standing."

"It isn't really harmed at all," said Captain

Ben. "The chimney is used to having a fire in it, and all that happened in the kitchen is that a little water got spilled. Don't worry about the fire any more. Let's go in and talk. I want to get down to my place at the shore, and take you there with me."

Indeed there was no more danger from the fire. The crowd, seeing there was no further excitement, began to move away. The firemen coiled up their hose, and the engines and carts rumbled away. Norah shook her head dubiously as she saw the sloppy kitchen that she always kept so clean and bright, but Jerry Simms consoled her.

"I'll help you mop it up, Norah!" he kindly offered. "Water is easily gotten rid of—much more easily than fire. I'll help you clean up."

Norah was very thankful for this, and soon she and Jerry were busy setting things to rights in the kitchen while Daddy and Mother Bunker, with the children and Captain Ben, went into the sitting room. There was a smell of smoke all over, but no one minded this. Norah felt very bad, thinking that she might be blamed for the fire, since the chimney caught from the blaze she started in the kitchen range.

Mrs. Bunker realized this, and so she said:

"Don't worry, Norah. It would have happened to anyone. If I had started the fire the chimney would have caught just the same as it did when you started it."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say that," remarked Norah, as she and Jerry continued the cleaning-up work.

The excitement caused by the fire was over now, and a little later the Bunker family, including the half dozen children of course, and Captain Ben were sitting down and talking like old friends. In fact, they were all old friends except the new man who had climbed up on the roof to put out the fire.

"What makes you call him Captain Ben?" asked Vi, as she looked up at the stranger.

"Because he is Captain Ben," answered Mrs. Bunker. "And he is one of our relations, children!"

"My, what a lot of relations we have!" exclaimed Laddie. And when they all laughed he made haste to add: "But I like 'em all and I like you." He said this as he stood near the knees of Captain Ben.

"I'm glad you do," said the sailor-soldier.

"And I hope we shall all become better acquainted and have good times together."

"Will you tell us about the war?" asked Rose. "Jerry Simms tells us lots of funny stories about the war he was in."

"This was a different war," said Captain Ben, "and I may be able to think of something funny about it. I'll try, anyhow. But now let's talk about going away. I want to get as far from the war as I can, and I think my place at the seashore will take my mind off it—especially if I can have you children with me."

"I'll have to see about that," said Daddy Bunker, with a smile. "But at least we can talk about it."

So they talked, and Mother Bunker told the children that Captain Ben was a distant relative of hers, whom she had not seen for a long time. But his picture had been printed in the paper as one of the heroes of the war, and though Mrs. Bunker had not seen him for some years, she knew him the moment he rushed up on the porch to help in putting out the fire.

"Is Captain Ben like Cousin Fred?" asked Russ, when the matter of relationship was being talked about.

"He is a sort of cousin," answered Mother Bunker, "but I think it will be better if we all call him Captain Ben."

"I am most used to hearing that," said the soldier. "That is what I was in the marine corps—a captain. And though I am discharged now, many of my friends still call me captain."

"I like a captain," said Rose. "I think it's ever so much nicer than a general or a major. They always sound like names of dogs; but a captain is nice."

"I am glad you think so!" laughed Captain Ben, and so he was called that by the children.

"But what's your last name?" asked Vi. You might have known she would find some question to ask, and she did.

"My last name is Barsey," was the answer of Captain Ben. "But I don't imagine you children will have much use for it. Just say Captain Ben and I'll know who you mean."

There was more talk and laughter, and the six little Bunkers began to feel very well acquainted with Captain Ben. At dinner he told something of how he had enlisted and fought in the war, but he did not dwell much on this,

for he guessed, rightly, that Mr. and Mrs. Bunker did not want to have the children think too much about the terrible fighting that had taken place in France.

"And so, after I was discharged and was free to leave the army, I decided to take a long rest," said Captain Ben. "As you know, Cousin Amy," he said to Mrs. Bunker, "I have a very nice bungalow down on the Jersey coast at Grand View. It is all ready for me to go down there and spend the rest of the summer, and I want you all to come with me."

"Is there any more summer?" asked Laddie. "I thought we spent all the summer at Uncle Fred's."

"There is still some summer left," answered Captain Ben.

"That sounds funny!" laughed Laddie. "*Some summer!* Maybe I could make up a riddle about it."

"Do you like riddles?" asked Captain Ben.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Vi's twin brother. "Do you know any?"

"I might think of one," the young marine replied. "Let me see. Can you tell me when a door is like a little mouse?"

"A door like a little mouse!" exclaimed Rose. "I never heard of such a thing. A door can't be like a mouse because it's too big—I mean the door is."

"Oh, yes it can!" said Laddie, quickly. "Things in riddles can be like anything they want to. Don't tell me, Captain Ben!" he begged. "Let me see if I can guess it myself!"

"It isn't very hard," the soldier-sailor said. "I just happened to think of it, and perhaps you won't call it a riddle at all. But when is a door like a mouse?"

"Is it when it sticks fast and won't open?" asked Rose.

"A mouse can't open and shut!" objected Russ.

"It can open and shut its mouth, and a door can open and shut," said Laddie, who seemed to know more about riddles than any of his brothers or sisters.

"Is that the answer?" inquired Russ, while Mun Bun and Margy stood silently looking at Captain Ben.

"No, that isn't the answer," replied the soldier from France. "I guess I'll tell you, for you've had enough excitement to-day. A door

is like a mouse when it squeaks. The door's hinges squeak, you know, and the little mouse squeaks when he finds a piece of cheese."

"That's a good riddle!" declared Laddie. "I'm going to remember that, and ask Jerry Simms and Norah."

A little later supper was served, and at the table Captain Ben told more about his bungalow at Grand View.

"You have been to the seashore," he said to the six little Bunkers, "so there is no need to tell you how nice the ocean and the beach is to rest near. But Grand View is especially nice, because my bungalow is up on a high bluff and you can look away off across the water to a place called Sandy Hook."

"Do they catch fishes on Sandy Hook?" asked Rose, with a laugh.

"No, not exactly," answered Captain Ben. "Sandy Hook is a place——"

"We know, thank you," said Russ. "We passed near Sandy Hook when we went to Atlantic Highlands on our way to Cousin Tom's at Seaview."

"How did you like the seashore?" asked Captain Ben.

"Oh, we love it!" cried Rose, and all the other Bunkers echoed this. "Of course it was nice at Uncle Fred's ranch out West," Rose went on. "But the seashore is so nice and cool."

"Then I'll take you all there for another vacation!" said Captain Ben. "You don't need to unpack any more of your things," he went on to Daddy and Mother Bunker. "Just leave them as they are, load them in my auto, and we'll all go to my seaside bungalow at Grand View."

"Has you got a big auto?" asked Mun Bun, speaking for the first time in nearly half an hour.

"Yes, I have a great big machine," said Captain Ben. "I left it at a garage in town while I looked you folks up, as I was not sure where you lived. And you can guess how surprised I was to see a crowd of people in front of the house, to which the postman directed me, and to see fire and smoke coming out of the chimney."

"We were surprised, too," said Russ, as he started out on the porch to bring in the evening paper the boy had just tossed up. "We

were playing steamboat in the attic, and a lot of smoke came out and——"

"Don't talk any more about it," begged Mother Bunker. "I don't want it to get on your minds, or you may not sleep. I shall never forget how frightened I was."

"All the more reason for the whole family coming and spending the rest of the season with me," urged Captain Ben. "It is still late summer, and the fall is really the best part of the year to be at the shore. You'll come, won't you?" he asked Mr. Bunker.

The father of the six little Bunkers shook his head.

"It is too near school time," he said. "The new term will open next week. That, really, is what made us come back from the ranch. I don't want the children, especially the two older ones, to miss any of their classes. No, Captain Ben, I am sure we're all much obliged to you for your kind invitation, but it will be impossible for us to go on account of school."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Rose, and looks of disappointment came over the faces of the other children when they heard this.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Captain Ben. "Los-

ing a week or so of school will not matter. I have just set my heart on the six little Bunkers coming to my seashore bungalow."

Again Daddy Bunker shook his head. But, as the looks of sorrow deepened on the faces of Rose and the others, Russ came running in off the porch with the evening paper. He generally opened it and read the headings before delivering it to his father or mother.

"Oh, look! Look at this!" cried Russ as, holding the opened paper out in front of him, he hastened in where the others were. "I guess we can go to Captain Ben's after all! Look what's in the paper!"

CHAPTER V

THE MISSING WATCH

"WHAT'S the matter? Oh, let me see!" begged Rose, as Russ came in with a fluttering paper. "Are we going to have another school play?"

There had been one the previous winter, and Rose and Russ had taken part in it. Their pictures, as well as those of other young performers, were in the newspaper, and Russ and Rose were quite proud of this.

"No, it isn't another school play," Russ answered. "But there was an accident at our school, and now it can't open when it was going to. Oh, I'm glad! Now we don't have to go back to school and we can go to Captain Ben's bungalow at Grand View!"

"Let me see," requested Mr. Bunker, reaching out one hand for the paper, while with the

other he sought for his glasses in his vest pocket.

"Yes, that's right," he said, after he had read the item on the front page, the sight of which had so excited Russ. "There has been an accident at Montgomery school, where our children go."

"An accident!" exclaimed Mother Bunker. "Was any one hurt?"

"No, it wasn't that sort of accident," her husband answered. "It was just a break in the water pipes and the boiler that heats the school in cold weather. Of course they will not need heat right away, but the boiler will have to be fixed, and it will take over a month. This article in the paper says that the opening of Montgomery school will be postponed for a month. That means our six little Bunkers will not have to go back to their classes as soon as we thought they would," he added.

"All the better for me!" cried Captain Ben. "Now I can take you all to Grand View in my auto. You won't have any objections now, will you?" he asked Mr. Bunker.

"No," answered the father of Russ and the other five children, "I don't see how I can ob-

ject. As I told you, we came back from the West mainly on account of school, and if we had known in time that the Montgomery building was not to open we would have stayed at Uncle Fred's ranch."

"I'm glad you didn't," laughed Captain Ben. "For now I can have you visit me. I'll go right uptown and get my automobile, as I see you have a garage here. Then we'll all be ready to start for the seashore in the morning."

"Oh, my goodness! we can't go so soon as *that,*" cried Mrs. Bunker.

"Why not?" asked the captain.

"I have to look over the children's clothes and see what they need for this second, unexpected vacation. We couldn't possibly get ready for to-morrow."

"Well, the next day, then," insisted Captain Ben. "I'll go and get my auto and have it all ready."

"No, we can't go the next day, either," Mrs. Bunker answered with a laugh. "Why are you in such a hurry?"

"I learned that in the army, I guess," remarked the soldier. "But how soon can you go?"

"In about a week, I think," was the answer, and with that Captain Ben must needs be content.

He arose to go after his automobile, which he had left in a public garage uptown, and Rose and Russ obtained permission to go with him and ride back. The other children also wanted to go, but it was a little too far for their short legs.

"Oh, say, this is a dandy big car!" exclaimed Russ, as he and his sister climbed into it for the ride back home.

"Glad you like it," said Captain Ben. "We'll need all the room there is to take six little Bunkers and all their baggage to the shore for a second vacation."

The next few days were busy ones in the Bunker home. Every one was so occupied, helping to unpack, pack and get ready, that Laddie had no time to ask Norah or Jerry Simms about the riddle of the mouse and the squeaking door. But he did not forget it, and he thought he might find some one at Captain Ben's place at the shore whom he might puzzle with the riddle.

The damage done by the chimney fire was

soon cleared away and the chimney repaired, and the day after the newspaper contained an account of the happening. It interested the six little Bunkers almost as much as did the account of the accident to the Montgomery school.

On making some inquiries, Mr. Bunker found that what the paper had stated about the needed repairs at the school was true. No classes could start for more than a month after the date set for the regular opening of the other schools, and therefore the children could remain away without getting any black marks. There was no room for the pupils of Montgomery school in any of the other schools of Pineville.

As I have said, these were busy days at the Bunker home during the visit of Captain Ben, for he stayed at the Bunker residence until it was time to go to the seashore. Captain Ben helped pack, too, and he seemed to know just how to do it.

"This was another thing I learned when I was a marine," he said, as he showed Mrs. Bunker how to get more into a trunk than she had ever supposed it would hold.

Margy and Mun Bun, Laddie and Vi and Rose and Russ also helped pack, though, to tell you the truth, I do not believe that the four smallest children really did much helping. But they thought they did, and this gave them as much joy as if they had done it all themselves.

"Time to stop and eat!" exclaimed Captain Ben one noon, when several valises and trunks had been filled in readiness for the trip next day. "It's twelve o'clock," and he looked at a watch he wore on his wrist.

"Does your watch keep good time?" asked Violet.

"Yes, it is a very good watch," was the answer. "It was given to me by a French soldier who was hurt in the great war. I think a great deal of this watch, and I would not want to lose it. The man who gave it to me was in great danger, and I was able to help him out of it. He gave me this wrist watch as a keepsake. I prize it very much."

Though Captain Ben did not say so, he had really saved the life of the French soldier, venturing out on the battlefield and bringing in the wounded man.

The watch was an expensive gold one, set in

a strong leather strap, which was buckled about Captain Ben's wrist. Wearing the watch there enabled the former soldier to see what time it was without stopping to fish in his pocket for his time piece.

As the watch had indicated, it was noon—twelve o'clock—and soon the six little Bunkers were sitting down to the table. They talked over their plans as they ate the meal.

Large as was Captain Ben's auto, it would hardly hold the eight Bunkers, himself and the baggage that first would be needed. So it was decided that Mother Bunker would go down to Grand View on the train, taking Mun Bun and Margy with her. That would leave Daddy Bunker, Captain Ben, Russ, Rose, Laddie and Vi to come in the soldier's big car. They would have room enough then for several valises.

The rest of the afternoon and part of the next morning was spent in packing, while Mrs. Bunker made arrangements for again shutting the house up, after having opened it on her return from the West.

"This year has been the longest vacation the children ever had," she remarked. "Good-

ness! it doesn't seem any time at all since we started for Uncle Fred's, and here we are starting off on another trip."

"I hope you will like my place," said Captain Ben, as he finished strapping a large valise. "I wish we might have started a little earlier to-day, but I think we shall get there before dark."

"I think I shall be there ahead of you, going as I am in the train with Margy and Mun Bun," said Mrs. Bunker.

"I am not so sure about that!" laughed Captain Ben. "My auto can travel very fast when I get started. But what time does your train go?"

"At ten o'clock," answered the children's mother. "How much time have I?"

Captain Ben thrust out his arm as he always did when he wanted to look at his wrist watch, and, as he glanced down, an appearance of surprise came over his face.

"Why, my watch is gone!" he exclaimed.

"Gone?" echoed Mrs. Bunker. "Did you take it off and put it down somewhere?"

"No, I haven't had it off to-day," was the answer. "I had it on just before I strapped

that valise! It must have accidentally come off! I must find it! I wouldn't have that watch lost for anything!"

He began looking about the room.

"I'll call the children," offered Mrs. Bunker. "One of them may have seen it. Oh, Russ! Rose!" she called. "Come, children, and see if you can find Captain Ben's missing watch."

MRS. BUNKER AND THE TWO SMALLER CHILDREN STARTED FOR THE RAILROAD STATION.

CHAPTER VI

OFF TO GRAND VIEW

THE six little Bunkers, who had been scurrying around all over the house, helping, or at least thinking they were helping, to get ready for the trip, gathered in the big living room at the sound of their mother's voice.

"What's the matter?" asked Vi, beginning her usual questioning. "Is the chimney on fire again?"

"No," answered her mother. "But Captain Ben has lost his watch—the one the French soldier gave him. He thinks it became loose when he was helping pack the valises and trunks; so look around, children."

So the search began, but it was without result. Everything on the floor was lifted up, trunks and valises were moved aside, and even Norah and Jerry came in to help look. How-

ever, the watch could not be found, though the six little Bunkers aided all they could.

"Can't we go to Captain Ben's if he doesn't find his watch?" asked Vi.

"Oh, yes, that won't keep us from the trip," said the sailor-soldier. The marines are both soldiers and sailors, so either name fitted them. "But I would like to find my watch," Captain Ben added.

"Oh, I guess I got it—I mean I guess I stepped on it!" suddenly exclaimed Laddie, as he trod on something that was under a piece of paper.

There was an anxious moment, but when the paper was lifted up all that was under it was a tin whistle that Mun Bun had been playing with.

"Oh, dear!" said Laddie. "I thought sure I had it!"

The watch remained unfound, but the packing went on. Soon it was time for Mrs. Bunker to start for the train with Margy and Mun Bun. They were to go on ahead, as the way to Grand View by the train was longer than by the automobile road.

Captain Ben was to take Mrs. Bunker and

the two smaller children to the railroad station in his car, leaving Mr. Bunker to attend to the last details of the packing with Russ and Rose, Violet and Laddie. Of course, Jerry Simms and Norah also helped.

"Good-bye, children! I'll see you at Grand View!" called Mother Bunker, waving her hand to her four children as she sat beside Mun Bun and Margy in the automobile.

"Good-bye!" echoed Russ and the others. And the two smaller Bunkers waved their hands. They were delighted at the idea of a ride in the steam cars.

In a little while Captain Ben came back from the station with his empty automobile. As he alighted to go into the house, to see that the others were ready for the trip, he thrust out his left arm and looked down at his wrist.

"Oh, I forgot my watch was lost," he said with a grim laugh. "I have been so used to looking at the time that it comes natural to stick out my hand where I can get a good view of my wrist. Well, if my watch is gone—it's gone—that's all there is to it."

"Maybe Norah will find it after we have

left," suggested Rose. "Lots of times she finds things we lose."

"I hope she does," echoed Captain Ben. "Well, never mind the watch now. Let's get ready to start. We must be off. It is getting late!"

The last valise was strapped shut, the expressman had taken the trunks that did not go as baggage, and now the four little Bunkers with their father and Captain Ben, went out on the porch, after saying good-bye to Norah and Jerry Simms.

Into the captain's big car piled the four children.

"It seems funny not to have mother and Margy and Mun Bun with us, doesn't it?" asked Rose, as she took her place with Russ, Vi and Laddie, her father and Captain Ben being in the front seat.

"Yes, it does," agreed Russ. "But we'll be with them to-night again, won't we, Captain Ben?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, we'll all be at my bungalow at Grand View this evening," said the sailor-soldier. "Your mother may get there first, but I have told her where to find the keys, so she

can get everything all ready if she gets there ahead of us."

"Well, I think we're all ready to start," said Daddy Bunker at length. "Everything is all right, isn't it, Norah?"

"Oh, yes," answered the cook. "But it's sorry I am to see you go away again so soon after coming home. You're taking two vacations the same summer, children."

"Yes, and it's lots of fun!" cried Russ. "I'm glad the boiler in the school got leaky. I didn't want to go back so soon, anyhow."

Final good-byes were said, and then Captain Ben started his automobile down the street, the four children looking back as long as they could see Norah and Jerry Simms and waving farewells to them.

Out through the streets of Pineville they rode, Rose and Russ calling to various children of their acquaintance whom they met.

"Did you ride in this kind of an auto in France?" asked Russ of Captain Ben.

"Not very often," was the answer. "I had to walk most of the time, and I was glad I could. Lots of poor fellows were so crippled they couldn't walk."

"Do you know any French riddles?" Laddie wanted to know, as they turned out on a country road.

"French riddles?" repeated Captain Ben. "Do you mean you want me to tell you a riddle in the French language?"

Laddie shook his curly head.

"I don't know how to speak French," he said. "What I want is a French riddle that will be different from any riddle I know in English."

"I'm sorry, but I can't think of any," replied Captain Ben Barsey.

"Could you tell us a funny story about the war?" asked Russ.

Captain Ben thought for a moment.

"There wasn't very much chance to have fun when the fighting was going on," he answered, "but of course I didn't have to fight all the while. I remember once, being in a trench—that's like the big ditch over there," and he pointed to one at the side of the road along which the automobile was traveling at the time.

"Did you sleep in the ditch?" asked Vi.

"Yes," answered Captain Ben, "at times we

slept in the trench ditch, and very often we ate in them. I was going to tell you about a funny thing that happened to me when I was getting ready to eat my dinner in a trench one day.

"We had been fighting all morning, but had stopped about noon, and then they brought us soldiers in the trench something to eat. I was very hungry and so were my friends. I got a piece of bread and some meat and made myself a sandwich. I also had a tincup of coffee.

"I laid the sandwich down on a stone for a moment to take a drink of coffee, and when next I reached out my hand for the bread and meat I felt it jump away."

"Oh, was it alive?" asked Russ.

"Well, I thought so, for a moment," answered the captain. "But when I looked, after getting over my first surprise, I saw that I had put my hand on a big, gray rat. He had come out of his hole in the trench and was eating my bread and meat. Of course he moved when I touched him."

"I'm glad I wasn't there," said Rose. "I don't like rats!"

"I wish I could just look at him—but that's all," said Russ.

"Did you make him give you back your sandwich?" questioned Vi.

"Hardly!" laughed Captain Ben. "I didn't want it after the rat had nibbled it. So I shooed him away, and managed to get some more bread and meat. But I'll never forget how funny it seemed when I thought I felt my sandwich moving under my hand."

The children laughed at this story of the funny side of war, and by this time the automobile was well away from Pineville and on the way to Grand View.

"I think this is the nicest summer I ever knew," said Rose to Russ. "We are having two vacations."

"It is lots of fun," he agreed.

Laddie was saying little. He seemed very sober.

"What's the matter?" Rose asked him.

"I know a good riddle about an automobile, but I can't just think of it," said the little boy. "I want to ask Captain Ben a riddle, but I can't think of the right one."

"Don't worry!" laughed the sailor-soldier. "I'll be with you the rest of the summer, and you can ask me all the riddles you think of."

"Oh, I can think of a lot!" declared Laddie. "But I have an extra good one about an auto, only I don't know what it is."

As the automobile was passing through a little country village, Vi saw a candy store, where, also, soda water was sold.

"Can't we stop here and get a drink?" she asked. "I'm thirsty!"

"Yes, we can stop," her father said, and he was just asking Captain Ben to slow up at the store when a woman ran from it in great excitement, waving her hands and calling aloud:

"Stop! Stop! Oh, wait a minute! Something terrible has happened! Oh, come in! Come in!"

And from the store, out of which the woman had rushed, came a loud hissing sound, while what seemed to be a lot of steam, or a spray of water, floated from the door behind her.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORM

Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker, on the front seat of the automobile, looked in astonishment at the excited woman and at the white spray coming from her little store.

Russ and Rose and Laddie and Violet, four of the six little Bunkers in the rear of the car, were also much surprised, wondering what had happened.

"It must be a fire!" exclaimed Russ, remembering what had happened that day he and the others were playing steamboat in the attic, when the chimney began to smoke in the wrong way.

"What makes the fire?" questioned Vi. It was just like her to ask a question at this critical time.

As for Laddie, he said nothing. But his eyes opened big and round, and perhaps he was

trying to think up a riddle about the woman who had rushed from the store with a cloud of steam behind her.

And this woman—the one who owned the candy store—was still waving her hands and crying excitedly to Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker.

"Oh come in! Please come in and see what the matter is!" she begged.

By this time Captain Ben had stopped the automobile, and he was getting out, followed by Mr. Bunker. The latter turned to Russ, Rose, Vi and Laddie and said:

"Now you little Bunkers stay right in the car until we see what the matter is."

"Can't I come and see, too?" Vi asked.

"No, indeed! There may be danger!" her father said.

Several persons from the village streets were now running toward the little candy and soda water store, and one boy began to shout:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Quickly the woman turned to him.

"Don't say that, Johnnie Mack!" she exclaimed. "It isn't a fire at all, and I don't

want a lot of engines and hose carts coming and mussing my place up!"

"If it isn't a fire, then what is it?" asked Captain Ben. "Though it does look more like steam than smoke," he added, as he glanced at the white cloud still coming from the doorway of the store.

"What is it? What's the matter? What happened?" were some of the questions asked of the woman.

"I don't know what it is! I can't exactly tell, but it's something dreadful!" she said to Captain Ben, who, with Daddy Bunker, was about to enter the place. "All I know is that I was drawing a glass of soda water for a little girl when, all of a sudden, there was a big noise down in the cellar and then a lot of steam shot up into my store. I ran out, and the little girl ran out, and that's all I know about it."

"I think I know what it is," said Captain Ben. "There isn't any fire and there's nothing serious. One of the soda water tanks in the cellar has sprung a leak and the water is shooting out in a fine spray. It is just as if you left one of the faucets of your soda fountain open," he went on.

"Dear me! All my nice soda water running to waste!" exclaimed the woman. "But I'm glad it isn't a fire."

"Won't there be any soda water left for us to drink?" asked Vi.

"There won't unless I shut it off pretty soon!" said Captain Ben. "How do you get down into your cellar?" he asked the candy store woman. "I'm afraid I can't see my way to go in through the front door," he added, as he looked at the cloud of fizzy spray which almost hid the little store from sight.

"You can get down the outside cellar stairs," she answered. "I'll show you."

While the crowd and the four little Bunkers looked on, Captain Ben went down the outside stairs to the cellar in which stood the tanks of soda water. The tanks were filled with a gas which makes the bubbles in soda water.

The soldier-sailor knew just what to do, and in a little while the hissing sound stopped, the clouds of watery spray blew away, and it was possible to enter the store.

Not much damage had been done, for, after all, it was only a fine spray of water that had floated about, and it was such a fine spray that

it was almost like steam. The crowd swarmed about, looked in, and, seeing nothing to wonder at, passed on.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you, sir," said the candy store woman to Captain Ben. "For a time I thought my place was going to be blown up. I'm glad it wasn't, for I have to make my living by my little store."

"Have you any soda water left?" inquired Vi, who, with the other little Bunkers, had got out of the automobile when the crowd melted away.

"Yes, I have some in bottles. I don't suppose I could draw any from the fountain, could I?" she asked Captain Ben.

"Not very well until the broken pipe is mended," he answered.

"Bottled soda is all right," declared Russ. "We can drink it from straws if you have any," he added.

"Yes, I have some," the store woman said, and soon the four little Bunkers were sitting on stools in front of the counter, sucking soda water through straws out of bottles. Captain Ben insisted on using a straw also, but Daddy Bunker drank his from a glass.

"My, that tastes good!" said Captain Ben, as he drained the last of his sweet drink. "Many a time, in the army in France, I'd have walked ten miles to get a cool drink like that."

"The soda from the fountain is better," the woman said. "But I guess I won't have any of that to-day. I'll telephone for some one to come and mend the broken pipe."

"Can't I go down and see where it broke?" asked Laddie, when it was time for the little Bunkers to travel again. "I want to see it."

"There wouldn't be much to look at," Captain Ben told him. "It would only be a hole in a pipe, just as there might be a hole in the water pipe at home if it burst."

"Our water pipe did burst once," said Vi, "and I got awful nice and wet, and it was a hot day, too."

"That was lucky!" laughed Captain Ben.

"If I could see this broken pipe maybe I could make up a riddle about it," went on Laddie. "I didn't make up a riddle in a long, long time. And if I don't make up one pretty soon I'll have to ask the old ones over again."

"I'll tell you some new riddles when I get a chance," promised Captain Ben. "It's dark

down in the cellar, and you couldn't see anything much anyhow. Besides, we don't want to be late getting to Grand View, or your mother, with Margy and Mun Bun, will be there ahead of us. I'm not so sure, after all, but what they'll be there first anyhow," he said to Daddy Bunker. "It is later than I thought."

"Then we must hurry," said the children's father. "I wouldn't like Amy and the two children to be there alone after dark."

"They'll be safe enough," declared Captain Ben. "The key to my bungalow is at the house next door, and Cousin Amy can go in and make herself and Mun Bun and Margy perfectly at home in case they get there first. But we'll try to arrive ahead of them. I'll make the auto go a little faster."

"Doesn't it seem funny not to have Mun Bun and Margy with us on this trip?" asked Rose, as they all prepared to get into the automobile again.

"Indeed it does," said her father. "But you six little Bunkers will soon all be together again."

"Pile in!" called Captain Ben, and he helped Vi up into the seat to which Russ had already

assisted Rose. Laddie was just going to enter the car when he suddenly turned back and hurried toward the store.

"What's the matter now?" his father called after him. "Are you still going to look for the hole in the pipe where the soda water came out?"

"Maybe he left one of his riddles in there," suggested Captain Ben, with a laugh.

A moment later they saw what it was Laddie had gone back after—it was a little bag of cookies he had asked Rose to buy for him. He had laid them on the counter when he was drinking his soda water through a straw stuck in the bottle, and he did not intend to leave his lunch behind.

"Give me some!" begged Violet, when she saw what her brother had in his hand.

"I'll give us all some," he promised generously.

"All aboard, then!" called Captain Ben, and once more they were on their way toward Grand View. They stopped for lunch at a hotel in a small town, and the children were delighted at this. They always liked a change, no matter what it was.

"And we never had a summer like this," said Rose. "Two different vacation trips—one to Uncle Fred's and the other to Captain Ben's."

"We aren't at Captain Ben's yet," said Rose, as they started off again after their lunch.

"But we shall be pretty soon, sha'n't we, Daddy?" asked Rose.

"I don't know just how much farther it is," was the answer. "What do you say?" he asked, turning to the soldier-sailor.

The latter did not reply for a moment, and then he looked up at the sky, studied the clouds for a moment before he said:

"I don't want to look on the dark side, but I'm very much afraid we are going to be later getting to Grand View than I thought."

"Why?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"Because I think we are going to run into a storm, and that will delay us," said Captain Ben. "The roads are none too good, and with a heavy rain, such as it seems likely we'll have, we can't make very fast time."

"I just love to be in a rain in an auto when the side curtains are up, don't you?" asked Rose of Russ.

"I do if they don't leak," he answered.

"It's just like playing house in our attic," said Vi. "When do you think it will rain, Captain Ben?" she went on.

"Very soon, I'm sorry to say," he replied.

The sun went behind the clouds, and the afternoon changed from a bright, smiling one to a dark, frowning one. Then the wind began to blow, and in the west, behind some dark clouds, flashes of lightning could be seen.

Captain Ben made the automobile go as fast as was safe, hoping they might reach some place of shelter before the storm broke. It was not possible to get to his bungalow, as they were too far away.

Suddenly the machine began to slow up, just after a loud clap of thunder which followed a bright flash of lightning.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Rose. "Did it strike us?"

"Pooh! Of course not!" exclaimed Russ. "If we'd been hit you'd know it!"

"No, there is no danger yet," answered Captain Ben. "But I think we'd better stop and put up the side curtains before it rains, as it is going to soon, and rain hard," he said to Daddy Bunker.

The automobile was run beneath a tree at the edge of the road, and the two men began fastening up the side curtains. Hardly had they finished and climbed back into the machine, than there was a louder howl to the wind, the thunder rolled and crashed overhead, the lightning blazed in the black sky, and then the rain came down with pelting force, pattering on the top and sides of the automobile as it did on the shingle roof at the home of the six little Bunkers.

CHAPTER VIII

A QUEER NIGHT

"Isn't this fun!" shouted Rose, leaning back in the seat and putting her arm around Violet. "It's just like camping out."

"It's better'n camping out," declared Russ, who sat next to Laddie. The two smaller children were on the back seat of the automobile between Russ and his sister.

"What makes this better'n camping out?" Violet wanted to know. "Is it 'cause it rains harder?"

"No," Russ answered, "it's because we're under better shelter than we would be in a tent, camping out in the rain. No water can get through this auto top."

"Yes it can, too!" cried Laddie. "I just felt a drop on my nose."

"Oh, that just leaked in around the side cur-

tains," declared Russ, with a laugh. "We'll not get wet; shall we, Captain Ben?"

"I hope not," was the marine's answer, as he got ready to drive the car through the storm. He and Daddy Bunker were on the front seat, with the glass wind shield in front of them, and curtains at the sides, as there were at the back and at the sides near the seat where the children sat.

"You'll have to drive slowly," said Mr. Bunker in a low voice to Captain Ben.

"Yes, we can't make any speed," said the sailor. "The roads are mud puddles already."

Indeed it had rained so hard that in a very short time it seemed as though the automobile was going along through a small brook instead of along a country road. It was very dark, though it was only the middle of the afternoon. But by the lightning flashes, which came every now and then, the four little Bunkers, looking out through the celluloid windows in the side curtains, could see the streams of muddy water rushing along in the middle and on either edge of the country road along which they were traveling.

The thunder, too, boomed out every now

and then, a sound at which Laddie and Vi would jump in startled surprise and nestle closer to Russ and Rose. The smaller children were not exactly afraid, but they could not help jumping at the loud sound made by the claps of thunder.

Uncle Ben had to drive the car more and more slowly, for it was slippery on the muddy roads, and he did not want an accident. Finally, after he had to come almost to a standstill where a brook had overflowed the road, Russ and Rose heard their father talking to the soldier-sailor.

"Do you think it is safe to go on?" asked Mr. Bunker.

"No, I can't say that I do," answered Captain Ben. "I think we shall never be able to get to Grand View to-night."

"That's too bad," went on Daddy Bunker. "I'm not worrying about Amy and Mun Bun and Margy," he added. "They will be all right in your bungalow. But what are we going to do?"

"Well, we shall have to put up somewhere over night," answered Captain Ben.

"Oh, are we going to stay at a hotel?" asked

Rose. "I like hotels; don't you, Russ?" she asked her brother.

"Sometimes I do, when they have good things to eat," he answered, but his last words were almost lost in a crash of thunder. When the echoes of that had quieted down, Captain Ben said:

"I don't believe there is a hotel within ten miles of us, and we certainly can not travel that much farther in this storm."

"Then what are we going to do?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"Can't we stay in the auto all night?" asked Russ. "We have some blankets and things in our satchels."

"I'm afraid none of you would sleep much," said Captain Ben, as he slowed the machine to pass a bad spot in the road. "No, what we shall have to do," he added, "will be to stop at the first house we come to and ask them if they can take us in for the night. Some farmer may be kind enough to let us stay in his barn, if there isn't room in the house, but I guess they can manage, even if they have to make beds on the floor."

"I like to sleep on the floor!" spoke up

Laddie. "It doesn't hurt then if you fall out."

"No, it doesn't," agreed his father, with a laugh, and just then Rose looked ahead and exclaimed:

"There's a house! Maybe we can stop there!"

A lull had occurred in the storm, and through the mist and driving rain she pointed to a large, white house at the side of the road.

"I'll try that," said Captain Ben, and he steered the automobile up the drive. He got out, ran up the steps and knocked on the door. A pleasant-faced woman answered. What was said the four little Bunkers could not hear, but presently Captain Ben came running back.

"They will let us all stay here over night," he said. "They are very kind, and we shall be most comfortable. Hurry up on the porch, children, before it starts to pour again."

Hardly had Rose and Russ, Vi and Laddie got under the shelter of the broad porch of the farmhouse than it began to rain harder than ever. But the children did not mind now, for they were soon to be in better shelter than even the curtained automobile gave.

The farmer, who seemed as pleasant as his

wife, came out to show Captain Ben where to put the automobile in the wagon house, and soon the party was safe and snug in the comfortable house, while the storm raged outside.

"Now if we only had mother and Margy and Mun Bun here, we'd be all right," observed Rose.

"What's that? Are there any more of you?" asked the farmer, with a hearty laugh as he looked at the visitors. "One, two, three, four!" he counted the children. "Are there any more?"

"Oh, yes," answered Rose, also laughing. "There are six of us little Bunkers. Margy and Mun Bun are with my mother."

"Well, well! Six little Bunkers!" exclaimed the farmer. "And I have four of 'em! Wish I had all six to visit me!" he added. "I like children," he continued, turning to Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker. "I have none of my own, but my sister is visiting me, and she has three. Hear 'em?" he asked, holding up his hand for silence.

As the four little Bunkers and the others listened during a lull in the storm, there came

from upstairs the sound of merry laughter and shouting.

"The harder it rains and thunders the harder they play and laugh," said Mr. White, as the farmer said his name was. "I'll bring my sister's three youngsters down and let 'em play with your four. Then there'll be some little Bunkers and little brooks," he went on. "My sister's name is River, and I call the children little brooks." he added, with another laugh.

"Oh, that's almost like a riddle!" declared Laddie.

"Oh, ho! So you know riddles, do you?" asked the farmer.

Just then there was a loud noise out in the hall, and down the stairs came trooping the three little "brooks," as Mr. White called his sister's children. They soon made friends with the four little Bunkers, and then the storm was forgotten.

But it still rained hard, and the automobile could not have traveled in it, so it was a good thing they all stayed at the comfortable farmhouse. Mr. White said he had plenty of room for them all to sleep, even if his sister was visit-

ing them, and Russ was rather disappointed that he was not permitted to sleep out in the haymow.

"I wish I could get word to my wife that we will not be along until to-morrow," said Daddy Bunker, when it was certain they would have to stay all night.

"You can send her a telegram," suggested Mr. White.

So a telegram was telephoned to the nearest telegraph office, being sent to Mrs. Bunker, who, by this time, had reached Grand View. Then the Bunkers settled down to stay for the night. First, however, they were given supper, and such fun as the seven children had! They laughed and talked, and Laddie told all the riddles he knew.

Tom, Jack and Bess, the three little "brooks," were jolly children about the same age as the four little Bunkers, and Tom, the oldest boy, and Russ were soon fast friends, while Jack and Bess, who were nearer the age of Laddie and Vi, went off in a corner of the big living room after the meal and played games.

At night Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben

had one room, while Vi went in with Rose and Laddie slept with Russ.

The children were tired, and went to bed early. Just what time it was Rose did not know, but she was suddenly awakened by feeling a little hand on her face, and a voice said in her ear:

"I want to come in with you!"

"Is that you, Margy?" Rose asked, half asleep. She thought for a moment that she was back at home, and that Margy had come to "bunk in," as she often did.

"No, I'm not Margy," was the answer. "I'm Bess. An' I can't sleep with Jack 'cause he fumbles so." I think Bess meant tumbles, but she said "fumbles."

"Oh, you're one of the little brooks, aren't you?" asked Rose, more wide awake now.

"I'm Bess," was the answer, "an' I want to come in with you!"

Rose hardly knew what to do. There was scarcely room in the bed where she and Vi were sleeping, but this strange little girl insisted on climbing up.

Rose was thinking perhaps she had better call her father or Captain Ben and ask one of

them what to do, when, from the room across the hall where Russ and Laddie had a bed, came a cry from the little riddle-asking chap.

"Here! Quit that!" cried Laddie. "Let me alone! Stop pulling me out of bed!"

"Gracious, what a queer night!" thought Rose, as she sat up in bed. The storm had ended and it was very quiet except for the shouts of Laddie. He kept on calling:

"Let me alone! Oh, there you go! Now I'm out of bed!"

There was a thud, and the whole house seemed to shake.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE DITCH

Rose jumped out of bed, brushing aside the little River girl who had stolen so silently into her room, and hurried out into the hall, where a night light burned. As she hastened out, Rose gave a hasty glance at Violet. Her little sister had not awakened.

There was a patter of bare feet behind Rose, and she knew that Bess was following. As she went after Rose into the hall Bess exclaimed:

"Oh, there he goes! There he goes! He's gone and done it again!"

At the same time there was a confusion of voices in several rooms, and some one called:

"Never mind, Jack. Mother's coming!"

This was just what Rose had often heard her mother say when there had been some scare in the night among the six little Bunkers.

"He's gone and done it again!" cried Bess,

and she now clung to Rose's nightgown. Then from the room whence the thud of the fall had come, sounded another voice crying:

"I didn't mean to!"

"Well, this is getting more and more queer all the while!" thought Rose, rubbing her eyes to make herself more widely awake. "First it was Laddie who was calling about being pulled out of bed, but that wasn't Laddie who spoke last, nor Russ."

A moment later Russ appeared, coming from the room where he had been sleeping with his small brother Laddie. There was a strange look on Russ' face. As Rose looked at him she saw the little figure of Jack come out of the room behind Russ, even as Bess had followed her out of her room. And then came Laddie, making a procession of three little pajama-clad small boys.

At the other end of the hall Daddy Bunker appeared in his dressing gown, and then came Mrs. River and Mr. White.

"What's the matter?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"I don't know," Rose answered. "But this little girl—Bess—came into my room and woke me up. I didn't know what to do, and then I

heard Laddie call about being pulled out of bed, and——"

"And I was pulled out of bed, too!" Laddie interrupted. "Somebody came into my room in the night and pulled all the covers off me, and then he pulled me, and it wasn't Russ, either!" he added.

"No, it was him!" and Bess pointed an accusing finger at her small brother Jack. "He did it again, Uncle Ned," she added, looking toward Mr. White.

"Dear me! what is it all about?" asked Captain Ben, now appearing. "I don't quite understand."

"I think I can explain," said Mrs. River, who had slipped on a dressing gown and slippers. "Jack walked in his sleep again, didn't he, Bess?"

"Yes, Mother, he did. He got awful scrambly when I was sleeping with him, and I thought he was going to kick me out of bed, as he does lots of times, so I got out first."

"You did?" exclaimed her mother. "And where did you go?"

"In with her," answered Bess, pointing to Rose.

"Then Jack must have got up a little later and pulled this little boy out of bed," said Mrs. River. "I hope he didn't hurt you," and she patted Laddie on the head.

"Oh, no'm. I fell on a pile of bedclothes," he answered. "But it felt funny at first."

Jack, the innocent cause of all the trouble, stood scratching his back, or rather, trying to reach an itchy place in the very center. But his arms were not long enough.

"I'll scratch it for you," offered Laddie, and he did, amid the laughter of the grown folk.

"Is that all that happened?" asked Daddy Bunker, when quiet was restored.

"Yes," was the answer from Russ. "First I knew I heard Laddie yelling, and then he rolled out of bed."

"I didn't roll—I was pulled. He pulled me!" said Laddie, pointing to the poor little "brook" boy.

"I—I didn't mean to," said the poor little culprit. "I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't even know I got out of my bed."

"I think, when you get back in, I'll have to tie you with a piece of clothesline," his mother said. "He has often walked in his sleep be-

fore," she explained; "but I never knew him to pull any one out of bed until now."

The excitement was soon over, and the children went back to their beds and to sleep. Mrs. River took Jack in with her, and Bess was allowed to sleep with Rose and Violet, much to the delight of Bess. Violet never awakened through all these happenings, nor did Tom, the oldest River boy.

The sun was shining when the four little Bunkers came down to breakfast the next morning, and they laughed with the little "brooks" at the memory of what had happened in the night.

"As soon as I heard that big bang I knew what had happened," said Bess. "I knew Jack had gone and done it again, but I didn't know who it was he had pulled out of bed."

Breakfast over, the four little Bunkers, with Captain Ben and their father, got ready to resume their trip to Grand View. They still had many miles to go, but they thought they could make it by night, even though the roads were bad.

"And they are pretty sure to be in poor condition," said Captain Ben, as he brought the

automobile around to the side porch. "We shall have to drive slowly on account of so much slippery mud after the rain."

Mr. White would not accept any money for having taken care of the travelers over night, and after thanking him and saying good-bye to the little "brooks," promising to come and visit them some time, the Bunkers started off once more.

"We'll have lots to tell mother when we see her," said Rose as she settled herself in the rear seat of the car.

"I should say so!" exclaimed Russ. "It surely was funny to wake up and hear Laddie yelling, and then to hear him fall out of bed!"

"And I didn't know what to think when I felt Bess touch me," remarked Rose. "At first I thought it was Margy."

"I guess Margy and Mun Bun are playing near the ocean now," said Vi. "I wish we were."

"You'll soon be with them," promised Captain Ben.

"And I'm going to try to think up a riddle about falling out of bed," said Laddie.

Though the sun shone and the weather was

fine now, there were traces of the night's storm on every side. In some places there were brooks still running high with water, and in one or two sections the road bed had been washed away, so that Captain Ben had to drive slowly and carefully.

They had just left a small village, after a stop to get something to eat and to let the children have soda water, when they passed a man driving an empty farm wagon.

"You folks want to watch out just the other side of the white bridge," this man called to Captain Ben.

"What's the matter?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"There's a bad piece of road just after you cross the white bridge," was the answer. "It's clay, and clay is slippery when it's wet. Watch out!"

"We will," promised Captain Ben, and he drove slowly along. They soon came in sight of the white bridge. It went over a canal, and there was a hill on either side of the bridge, which was raised high over the canal to allow boats to pass under it.

"I should say it was a bad, slippery road!" said Captain Ben, as the machine started down

the slope after crossing the bridge. "I'll just have to crawl."

He shut off all power and put on the brakes. For a little way the car went down well, and it seemed as if nothing would happen. Then, suddenly, the wheels slipped in the slimy clay and Daddy Bunker shouted:

"Look out!"

But, even as he spoke, the automobile slid to one side, and the next moment there was a crash and the four little Bunkers and their father and Captain Ben were almost standing on their heads inside the automobile, which slid into a deep ditch partly filled with water at the side of the road.

CHAPTER X

THE BAD RAM

THERE was silence for a moment, following the crash of the big touring car in the ditch, and then Violet piped up in her shrill voice asking, as of course you have guessed, a question.

"What happened?" demanded Violet, and then, as Captain Ben looked back and saw that all four little Bunkers were safe in the rear seat, though somewhat mixed up, and as he saw Daddy Bunker straightening up after having slid from the front seat, Captain Ben laughed.

"I guess more things happened than we'll know about right away," answered the marine. "Are any of you hurt?"

"I—I guess my nose got bumped," said Laddie. "It feels so, anyhow."

"You ought to know whether or not you bumped it," his father said.

"I didn't bump it—my nose bumped itself on the back of your seat," explained Laddie. "Anyhow, I don't guess it's bloodin', is it?" he went on, holding his hand to his nose. "Bloodin' " was Laddie's word for bleeding.

"No, it isn't bloodin' any," Vi told her brother. "But, oh, wasn't it funny the way we slid into the ditch?"

"I'm glad it is no worse than funny," said Captain Ben. "I felt the car sliding on the slippery road, but the brakes would not hold her back. I'm afraid something is broken, but I'm glad none of our bones are."

"Lessen Laddie's nose is," put in Vi.

By this time Daddy Bunker and the children had climbed down from the car. They could see now what had happened. It had slid almost head first into the roadside ditch, which was partly filled with muddy water from the last night's rain. The radiator, or that part of the automobile which is kept filled with water to cool the engine, was thrust into the muddy bank on the far side of the ditch. One of the front wheels was broken, and, in addition, the car was tilted on one side. If it had not been for the edges of the ditch holding the

car up, it would have turned right over on its side.

"Oh, the wheel is broken!" exclaimed Rose, as she looked at the splintered spokes.

"And we can't go on to Grand View and see mother!" added Vi.

"Shall we have to stay here all night?" Laddie asked. "If we do, we'd better get a tent, 'cause it won't be any fun sleeping in the automobile like that."

"No, it will not," said Captain Ben, as he walked around the car and looked at it from all sides to see the worst of the damage. "But we won't stay here all night. If we can't go on in this machine, we'll get another."

"I don't see how you can go on in this when a wheel is smashed," said Daddy Bunker.

"I have an extra wheel," Captain Ben said. "If that is the worst of the damage we can get over that, provided we can get pulled out of the ditch. That's the first thing to be done —get pulled out of the ditch. But it looks as though we should not get to Grand View even to-night, and I don't know what Cousin Amy will think of me for keeping her four little Bunkers away from her two nights in succes-

sion, not to say anything about her big Bunker," and as he said this Captain Ben looked at the children's father.

"Yes, I fear Amy will be missing us," said Mr. Bunker. "But we don't want to desert you, Captain Ben. If I had some way of talking to Amy and telling her just what has happened, letting her know the children are safe, I'm sure she wouldn't mind if we stayed on the road another night—that is if we have to."

"I'm almost sure we'll have to," said Captain Ben. "I am very sorry, but I seem to have brought you nothing but bad luck ever since I came. When I arrived your chimney was on fire. Then almost as soon as we start out we run into a storm and have to stay all night. We can't even have a peaceful night, for Jack made Laddie fall out of bed and there were all kinds of excitement."

"That was only fun!" laughed Rose.

"It sure was," agreed Russ. "And maybe this will be fun, too. That is, if mother doesn't worry, and we can get the car out of the ditch," he added.

"Oh, we can get the car out of the ditch, sooner or later," Captain Ben remarked. "And

I fancy we can get word to your mother—perhaps on the telephone. We'll try, anyhow."

As he spoke he thrust out his left arm and glanced down at his wrist.

"Ha! I forgot about my watch being gone," he exclaimed. "I'm so in the habit of looking at it that I forget it isn't on my wrist any more."

"Didn't you find your watch?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"No, it was lost in the excitement of packing, and I haven't seen it since," the soldier-marine answered. "I'd give a good reward to get it back, too, for I prize it very much because it was the gift of a Frenchman. But I don't suppose I'll ever find it."

"You may," said Daddy Bunker hopefully. "As soon as we get to your bungalow at Grand View I'll write back and ask Jerry Simms or Norah if they have found it. They may have picked it up after we left."

"Yes, they might," agreed Captain Ben. "And I'll give five dollars as a reward to whoever finds my lost watch," he added.

"Does that mean any of us?" asked Russ eagerly.

"Yes, any of the six little Bunkers," answered Captain Ben. "Or either of the two big Bunkers, which means daddy or mother," he added. "But we won't worry about my lost watch now. The main things to do are to get our auto out of the ditch and to let Mother Bunker know that we are all right and that we'll not be at Grand View to-night, unless you folks go on in the train and let me come later in the machine after I get it fixed."

"No, we'll stay with you," said Daddy Bunker. "We won't desert the ship, as the sailors would say. Of course I suppose I could send the children on and stay with you myself," he remarked.

"Oh, no! Please let us stay!" begged Russ. "It's lots of fun being wrecked in an auto."

"I like it, too," said Laddie. "And maybe I can think of a funny riddle about going in the ditch to tell mother."

"All right; then we'll stay with Captain Ben and help get the machine out of the ditch," said Daddy Bunker. "After it is on level ground we can try to put on the extra wheel, and perhaps then we can travel and get to Grand View rather late to-night."

"I hope so," said Captain Ben. "If we could get some fence rails, perhaps we could raise the auto out of the ditch ourselves. I used to do such things in France during the war."

"There's lots of fences around here," observed Russ.

This was true enough. The auto had gone into the ditch near the canal, and it was in a part of the country where there were many fields, bordered by rail fences. A long fence rail makes a very good lever, or lifter, for an auto, Captain Ben explained.

While the four little Bunkers wandered along the roadside, gathering flowers and tossing stones into a little brook, Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker took some rails from the fence. They intended to put them back when they had finished using them. With stones they built up a sort of pile, or pyramid, on which to rest part of the rail, while one end of it was shoved under the wheel that was deepest in the mud of the ditch. Then the two men pressed down on the other end of the rail.

Russ, who did not care much about picking flowers, came back to watch his father and the captain. Russ wanted to help, but he knew

this was no time to ask, so he sat on the grassy bank whistling softly, and making a little boat out of a piece of wood.

"I think we'll have to get help," said Captain Ben, as he straightened up after he and Daddy Bunker had pressed down heavily on the long end of the rail. "The two of us together are not strong enough to raise the car out of the ditch."

"Maybe I could help!" offered Russ eagerly.

"Not just yet," his father said, with a laugh. "Though a little later on we may call on you. I wonder if there is a place around here where we could get a couple of farmers to give us a hand," he went on.

"Here comes a canal boat," said Russ, looking down the still, quiet stream of water which was not like a brook or a river. The water in the canal did not run, but remained as still as the water in a bath tub.

"It's a nice canal boat," went on Russ, "and it's got some mules pulling it, and a man is driving the mules. Maybe he'd lend us his mules to help pull the auto out of the ditch."

"Maybe he would," agreed Mr. Bunker. "We'll ask him. But first let's put the fence

rail back under the wheel so when the canal boat man comes along we may show him what we want to do."

As Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben leaned over to put the fence rail in place, Russ turned from looking at the canal boat to glance over the field near the half overturned auto. And the boy caught sight of something that made him cry:

"Oh, look out! Look out! Here he comes!"

"Who's coming?" asked Daddy Bunker. "If it's a farmer who is going to find fault because we borrowed his fence rails, we can offer to pay him."

"Oh, it isn't a farmer!" cried Russ. "It's worse! It's a bad ram! A big, ugly sheep with horns, and he's going to bunk into Captain Ben, I guess! Oh, look out!"

CHAPTER XI

THE APPLE BOY

WHAT Russ had said was perfectly true. Daddy Bunker looked around just in time to see a big ram bounding out of the meadow toward Captain Ben, who was stooping to put the fence rail under the broken wheel of the automobile. And it was because of the rails that had been taken off the fence that the ram was able to get out of his meadow.

"Oh, look!" screamed Rose, who, with Laddie and Vi, had come back to the automobile, their hands full of wayside flowers.

"Don't let him bunk into me!" shrieked Vi.

"I'll make him go back! I'll throw stones at him!" cried Laddie.

"Indeed you'll not do anything of the sort!" exclaimed Rose. "Come back here, Laddie Bunker!" and she caught her little brother by his jacket and stopped him from running for-

THE BIG RAM RUSHED AT CAPTAIN BEN.

ward. Laddie had dropped his flowers, and was going to pick up some stones.

Russ had jumped to his feet and seized a stick. With that he intended to do as Laddie had said he was going to—attack the ram. But as the sheep creature with his long horns came nearer, and as Laddie saw what a big, ugly animal he was, the boy did not feel much like standing his ground.

By this time Captain Ben, who had not as yet seen the ram, straightened up.

"What's the matter?" asked the marine. "Has another accident happened?"

Just as he said this, and before Daddy Bunker could do as he was going to do, and thrust a fence rail between the ram's legs to trip him, the big sheep rushed full at Captain Ben.

"Baa-a-a-a!" bleated the ram, and with lowered head and curved horns, he struck Captain Ben "amidships," as the marine said after it was all over.

There was a dull thud, and Captain Ben was knocked over and down into the same ditch into which the automobile had nearly turned a somersault.

"Hi, there! Stop that! Go on away!" yelled Russ, jumping up and down, swinging his hat in one hand and waving a stick in the other. "Go on away!"

But the ram paid no attention to the shouts of the boy, nor to the screams of Rose, Laddie and Violet in the road a safe distance away.

"Are you hurt, Captain Ben?" asked Daddy Bunker, as he caught up a heavy rail and started toward the ram.

"No, not at all," came the answer from Captain Ben, who was getting up, after having been knocked down into the ditch. "Luckily for me I fell on a lot of soft grass."

"Don't get up or come this way, or this brute will butt you down again," warned Daddy Bunker. "I'll see if I can drive him away. Stay on the other side of the ditch."

"No, I'm coming to help you. The ram may try to horn some of the children," returned the soldier-sailor. It was just like Captain Ben not to run away from a fight, either with some enemy on the battle field or a savage ram in a meadow.

Not much hurt by having been knocked head over heels, Captain Ben caught up a stick, like

Daddy Bunker, and, leaping across the ditch, started to run toward the ram. The big, woolly creature stood on a little hill, looking at the partly overturned automobile, then at the two men rushing toward him, and then at Russ and the other children.

"You get back where you belong and let me work on my auto!" called Captain Ben, as he raised his fence rail to push the ram away. "Get back in your own meadow!"

"We can't make him stay there unless we put back the fence rails, I guess," said Daddy Bunker. "And we have to use them to get the auto out of the ditch."

The two men, with the long rails, rushed at the ram. But he stood his ground, shaking his head, stamping with his forefeet, and uttering loud "Baa-a-as!"

Just as Daddy Bunker and Uncle Ben were going to thrust at the ram, a voice behind them called:

"Look out, friends! That's a bad animal! Once he goes on a rampage there's no stopping him."

The four little Bunkers and their father and Captain Ben turned to see the canal mule

driver rushing to their aid with a long whip in his hand.

"I know old Hector, the ram!" said the mule driver. "He's butted me more than once, and he tried to butt one of my mules. But that time he got the worst of it. Better let him alone!"

"But we want to drive him away," called Captain Ben. "He knocked me into the ditch, and he won't let us get our auto out. We've got to drive him away."

"Well, then, I'll help you," offered the mule driver. "Maybe if all three of us go at him at once we can scare him away."

"Let me help!" begged Russ. "I can throw stones!"

"No! No!" exclaimed his father. "You look after Rose and the children. Better climb back into the auto. He can't get at you there."

Russ started to do as his father had requested, and then the three men rushed at the ram together. The mule driver cracked his whip, making sounds like Fourth of July firecrackers. Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker shouted and waved their fence rails. The ram stood for a moment, poised on top of a little

mound of grass, where he had climbed after butting Captain Ben.

"Baa-a-a-a!" bleated the big sheep, as though saying he was not afraid of all of them.

But before Captain Ben or Daddy Bunker could reach at him with the rails, and before the mule driver could flick him with the cracking whip, the ram thought better of his idea. He uttered another loud "Baa-a-a!" and then, turning, ran back into the field whence he had come.

"Oh, I'm so glad he's gone!" cried Rose, who, with the other little Bunkers, had been about to climb into the tilted automobile.

"He may come back again," said the mule driver. "He's a bad one, all right, that ram is. I've been traveling this canal towpath for five years, and I know old Hector. Whenever he gets loose there's trouble."

"I guess we were too much for him this time," said Daddy Bunker. "I fancy he did not like the cracking of your whip."

"That's about the only way I can scare him," said the mule driver. "I'll keep it handy in case he comes back."

But Hector, the ram, did not seem to have

any idea of coming back. He ambled off over the green meadow, now and then looking back and uttering a "Baa-a-a!" It was as though he had decided he had had enough fun for one day. And he must have laughed to himself, if rams ever laugh, at the funny manner in which he had butted Captain Ben head over heels into the ditch.

"My, but you seem to be in a peck of trouble," said the mule driver, as he looked at the automobile in the ditch. "Can I help any?"

"I was just going to ask you to, when my little boy called out about the ram," answered Daddy Bunker. "Do you think you can help us get the auto on level ground, so we can put on an extra wheel?"

"I'll do my best," offered the mule driver. "I saw something was wrong, so I ran over from the towpath. There's another man on the boat. I'll call him. I guess the four of us can manage it. But it will probably take some time."

"Yes, I think it will," said Daddy Bunker. "And it is nearly noon, too. Do you know if there is a hotel around here, or a place where

I can take the children to stay while we are working on the car?"

"There isn't any hotel," said the mule driver, "but about a quarter of a mile down the road is Mr. Brown's place. He has a big farm and orchard, and he sells meals to auto travelers, and sometimes keeps them over night."

"That might be just the place for us," said Daddy Bunker. "We may have to stay all night again."

"If we do," said Rose, "I hope nobody walks in his sleep."

"What's she mean?" asked the mule driver.

"That's what happened where we stayed last night," explained Mr. Bunker. "There were some other children at the farmhouse, and one of them walked in his sleep."

"There aren't any children at Mr. Brown's," said the mule driver, "and I never heard of him or his wife walking in their sleep. They have good meals there, too—roast chicken, hot biscuits, pie, cake——"

"Oh, I'm so hungry!" cried Vi. "Mayn't we stay there, Daddy?"

"At least we'll go there for dinner," said her father. "And then, later, we'll decide about

to-night. Come on, children, I'll take you to Mr. Brown's country farm hotel, and then I'll come back to help Captain Ben."

Mr. Brown's place proved to be a sort of wayside boarding house, where automobile parties often stopped. He and his wife said they would look after the children while the men worked on the automobile. And, if need be, the party could stay all night.

"The only thing is I must get word to my wife. I'd like to talk to her on the telephone," said Daddy Bunker.

"I have a long distance telephone right in the house," said Mr. Brown. "You call her up and see what she says."

This Mr. Bunker did, managing to get his wife on the telephone in Grand View. He told her briefly what had happened, and said they might not be at Captain Ben's bungalow that night even, on account of the accident.

Mrs. Bunker told her husband not to worry, as she was all right with Margy and Mun Bun, though of course lonesome for him and the other little Bunkers.

"Then we'll remain here to-night if we can't get the car fixed," said Daddy Bunker to Mr.

Brown. "I'll let the children stay here now, and Captain Ben and I will come and get our dinner a little later."

Russ, Rose, Laddie and Vi thought the Brown homestead was one of the nicest places they had ever visited. While dinner was being got ready they sat on the broad porch and told Mr. Brown some of their adventures so far on this trip.

"My, you've had a lot happen to you," he said. "Automobiling is a risky business I take it. I'll stick to horses. I remember once I was in an auto and I——"

Mr. Brown stopped suddenly, looked down toward his orchard and cried:

"There he is again! That pesky apple boy! I'll get him this time, and I'll teach him to steal my fruit! Hi there, you pesky apple boy!" he shouted, as he leaped from his chair and started on a run toward the orchard.

CHAPTER XII

OFFERING HELP

Russ, Rose, Laddie, and Vi, who had been sitting in chairs on the porch near Mr. Brown, listening to him talk about the uncertainties of an automobile, also jumped up as the boarding-house keeper cried out and left his seat. Russ looked in the direction the farmer pointed and saw, amid the trees in the apple orchard, a boy about his own size running as fast as he could run toward a fence. And, as the boy ran, apples dropped from his pockets to the grass.

"Hi there, stop, you pesky apple-taker of a boy!" yelled Mr. Brown. "What do you mean by coming into my orchard and taking my apples!"

The boy said never a word, but ran all the faster toward the fence.

"Come on!" called Russ to Rose. "Let's go and see if he catches him!"

Laddie and Vi followed their older brother and sister down off the porch, and ran after Mr. Brown into the apple orchard, which was not far from the house.

"What's the matter, children?" cried Mrs. Brown, coming from her kitchen where she was getting dinner ready. "Are you running away?"

"We're going to see Mr. Brown catch the apple boy," Russ answered back over his shoulder.

"Is that pesky apple boy here again?" asked the farmer's wife.

"What's a pesky apple boy?" asked Laddie, as he ran along beside Russ. "Is it a riddle? If it is I wish she or Mr. Brown would tell me the answer."

"No, 'pesky' is sort of mean, I think," explained Russ.

"Hi there! Don't you run off with my apples!" shouted the farmer again, and by this time the boy had reached the fence. He started to climb over it, but it was too high, or else he was too small, and as he wiggled and struggled many more apples kept dropping from his pockets. He seemed to have filled his coat and

trousers pockets pretty full with Mr. Brown's apples.

"Now I have you!" cried Mr. Brown, as he rushed up to the boy and pulled him back just as the little fellow might have gotten over the fence if he had had a moment more. "Now I have you! I'll teach you to take my apples! I warned you if I caught you in my orchard again I'd have you arrested, and now I'm going to! I told you to keep out of my orchard!"

"No, you didn't," answered the boy in a sullen voice, as the farmer took hold of his collar and began to drag him toward the house.

"What makes you say I didn't?" demanded Mr. Brown, while Russ, Rose, and the others looked on wonderingly. "Didn't I tell you not to take any more of my apples?"

"No, you didn't!" exclaimed the boy. "And I wish you'd let me go! I never was in your orchard before, and I never took any of your apples before, and I wouldn't have taken any now only I was so hungry I was almost starved!"

His chin began to tremble, and so did his lips, and it was easy to see he was almost ready to cry.

Mrs. Brown came down through the orchard to meet her husband.

"I see you caught him," she said. "We'll teach him not to take any more of our apples! Bring him along and send for the constable. He'll take him to the lockup!"

"Oh, please don't have me arrested!" begged the boy, who was a little older than Russ. "I never took any of your apples before, and I wouldn't have taken any now, only I was so hungry I couldn't help it. I didn't have any supper, and I didn't have any breakfast and I didn't see where I was going to get any dinner, and——"

"Here, Abner Brown, you let that boy go!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Brown, and there was a new note in her voice and a different look on her face. "Poor child! He's half starved, anybody can see that! And I have a good dinner almost cooked and ready to serve. You come right along with me, poor child. I'll give you your dinner with these other children."

"Oh, thank you!" said the boy, as the farmer let go of him. "Honest, I never took any of your apples before. I only just got here," he went on. "I've been walking a long way, and

when I saw the apples I was so hungry I just couldn't help taking a few."

"Are you sure you were never in my orchard before?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Sure!" was the answer. "I never was in this town before. I don't even know the name of it."

"Of course this isn't the same boy, Abner," went on Mrs. Brown. "A body could see that with their eyes shut. The other boy, who's been taking our apples, has red hair. This boy's is brown. 'Tisn't the same one at all!"

"I'm glad of it," said the farmer. "But I would like to catch that chap who's been stealing from my orchard. Not that I mind a few apples. I'd give 'em to him willingly if he'd come and ask me. But I don't like a pesky apple thief! Though how you can see even red hair with your eyes shut, Mother, I don't know," he added, with a laugh at his wife.

"Never mind about that," she said to her husband. "He isn't the same boy, and I'm glad of it. Come on up to the house," she went on. "I reckon I can give you a better dinner than just apples, though they're good enough to eat when you want 'em."

"Thank you," said the boy gratefully. "I'll do some chores for you to pay for my meal and the apples I took, if you'll let me," he went on. "I offered to work for a man last night, to pay for my supper, but he wouldn't let me, and he said if I didn't get off his place he'd set his ugly old ram after me."

"Maybe that's the same ram that butted Captain Ben!" exclaimed Rose.

"Did that old ram of Hank Yardon's get loose?" asked Mr. Brown, as he walked back to the house with the children.

"Yes," answered Russ, and he told what had happened.

"Well, well!" said the farmer. "It's a good thing the canal mule driver happened along. Hector is a bad one!"

"Do you live here?" asked the "apple boy," as Rose called him. He put his question to Russ, beside whom he was walking to the house.

"No," was the answer. "We're on our way to Captain Ben's at Grand View and——"

"Where'd you say?" interrupted the boy quickly.

"Captain Ben's," said Rose.

"No, I mean the name of the place."

"Oh! Grand View," went on Russ. "It's on the seashore, and we're going there for our second vacation. We had one at Uncle Fred's ranch in the West, but something went wrong with the pipes in our school, and we couldn't go back for a month, so Captain Ben invited us to Grand View."

"Hum! Yes. Grand View," murmured the apple boy, who had said his name was Tad Munson.

"Do you know where it is?" asked Rose, while Laddie and Vi ran on ahead, racing to see who would first reach the front porch of the farmhouse.

"Yes, I know," was the low-voiced answer. "And I wish I was there. But I don't see how I can get there. All my money is gone, and none of the farmers want any work done that I can do. But I'm glad I'm going to have some dinner," he went on. "I can smell it now, and it makes me hungrier than ever."

"I'm hungry, too," said Russ.

"Are you going around in an automobile?" asked Vi, coming back after she had beaten Laddie in a race to the porch.

"An automobile? I should say not!" cried the boy. "I travel on shanks' mules, I do."

"Are they like canal mules?" Vi wanted to know.

"Not exactly," answered the boy, smiling. "They're my legs—shanks I call 'em—and I've walked many a mile on 'em since I—well, for the last week," he said quickly.

Russ looked at the boy sharply. There seemed to be something strange about him—as though he wanted to hide something—to hide something more than the apples he had stuffed into his pockets.

"If I could get back anywhere near Grand View I'd never go away again," said the boy in a low voice. "I guess I did wrong, but it's too late now. I wish——"

Just then the voice of Mrs. Brown was heard calling:

"Come to dinner, children!"

"Ah! That sounds good!" murmured Tad Munson.

Russ, Rose and the others thought the same, and soon they were sitting down to a bountifully supplied table. As the canal mule driver had said, there was roast chicken, hot biscuits

with plenty of gravy, and many other good things.

"I wish Daddy and Captain Ben could have some of this," said Rose, as she passed her plate for a second helping.

"Oh, I'll save plenty for them," said Mrs. Brown. "I always cook a lot, because automobile folks are almost always hungrier than the general run. Are you feeling better?" she asked the strange boy who had taken the apples.

"Oh, I feel a lot better," he said. "I can't thank you enough, nor tell you how sorry I am I took your apples," said Tad. "I'll do some chores to pay for my meal."

"I think we sha'n't worry about that," said Mr. Brown, with a laugh. "I didn't mean to collar you quite so roughly, but I've been bothered a lot with the pesky apple boys."

"I know a riddle about apples," said Laddie.

"Do you?" asked Mrs. Brown. "What is it?"

"It's like this," went on Laddie. "Why is an apple like a wax doll?"

"Why is an apple like a wax doll? I never heard of such a thing!" laughed the farmer's

wife. "An apple isn't any like a wax doll that I can see."

"Yes it is," said Laddie. "An apple is like a wax doll 'cause they both have red cheeks. A wax doll has red cheeks, and an apple has red cheeks."

"What about a green apple?" asked Mr. Brown, as the others laughed at Laddie's little riddle.

"Oh, well, I didn't mean a green apple," said the little boy.

Dinner was half over when Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben came in.

"Did you get the auto out of the ditch?" asked Russ.

"Yes. But it's more badly broken than I thought," Captain Ben replied. "It can't be fixed until to-morrow, so we shall have to stay here all night. You don't mind as long as your mother and the other two little Bunkers are all right, do you?" he asked Russ.

"Oh, no," was the answer. "It's fun here!"

"And there was a pesky apple boy, only he wasn't the same one 'cause he didn't have red hair," explained Vi, "and there he is now!" and she pointed to Tad, whose face got as red

as the wax doll's cheeks that Laddie told about in his riddle.

"Oh, another youngster," remarked Captain Ben. "Are you a stalled autoist, too?"

"No such luck," replied the boy. "I have to walk when I travel. And I wish I could hurry and travel right now to Avalon."

"Avalon on the coast?" asked Captain Ben quickly.

"Yes," answered the boy. "Avalon is where I want to get to. But I don't see how I'm going to."

"Avalon is only a little distance from Grand View, where I have my summer bungalow," went on the sailor. "If you'd like to get there I can take you as far as I'm going. And you can get a trolley car to Avalon from Grand View."

"Yes, I know I can," went on the boy. "I'd be ever so much obliged if you'd take me as far as Grand View."

"I guess we can do that," promised the captain. "We'll give you help along the way as soon as our car is in shape, which won't be until morning, however."

"I'll wait and ride along with you, if they'll

let me sleep here in the barn," said the boy, with a look at Mr. Brown.

"Oh, shucks! We have plenty of room for you in the house," said the farmer's wife. "Stay and welcome!"

"All right, I will, and thank you," the boy replied.

"And now you men folks had better sit up and get your dinner," went on Mrs. Brown. "Getting autos out of ditches is hungry work."

"Indeed it is!" agreed Captain Ben.

He and Daddy Bunker had almost finished their pie, which was the last course of the meal, when a man came rushing up the front path.

"Say, whoever owns that auto that's stuck in the ditch had better hurry back there!" the man called. "Something's the matter! I can hear a lot of yelling around the bend in the road!"

Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben hurried from the table.

"Goodness! what's going to happen now?" said Rose to Russ.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MISSING BOY

THE four little Bunkers had finished their dinner before their father and Captain Ben had started to eat. Tad Munson, the "apple boy," had also completed his meal, and as the man came running in from the road, calling out that something was wrong down where the automobile had been left, Russ, Rose, Vi and Laddie, together with Tad, started after Mr. Bunker and Captain Ben.

"What you s'pose it is?" asked Vi, as she pattered along with her twin brother, holding his hand.

"I don't know," answered Russ, who was running with Rose. "This is no time to ask a lot of questions, Vi."

"I didn't ask a *lot*. I asked only *one*," retorted the little girl. "And I think you might answer that."

"I would if I knew the answer," said Russ, smiling a little; "but I don't. We'll run along and see what's happening."

"Maybe somebody is trying to take the auto," suggested Tad, who had made good friends with the four little Bunkers.

"I guess they couldn't take Captain Ben's car unless they put on a new wheel and did a lot of other things," said Russ. "It was pretty badly smashed and they couldn't have fixed it so soon."

"No, I guess not," agreed Tad. "Anyhow, something's happening."

This was true enough. As the children ran out of the gate and down the road after the man who had given the alarm, their father, and Captain Ben, they could hear through the quiet, still country air a loud shouting around the bend in the road where the auto was in the ditch, about a quarter of a mile away.

As the little Bunkers and the others hurried away from his house Mr. Brown was heard to say:

"I knew it! You can't tell me autos are safe! Something's always happening to 'em! Give me a horse every time!"

A little later Russ, Rose and the others came within sight of the place where Captain Ben's car had gone into the ditch. The children saw their father and Captain Ben approaching a crowd of men, who surrounded the car.

"What'd I tell you?" cried Tad. "Some thieves are trying to take your auto!"

"It does look so," agreed Russ, for certainly there was quite a throng about the machine, and all the men seemed much excited.

Suddenly, however, the crowd about the stalled car parted, and out from among them ran a mule, who brayed loudly and kicked up his heels as though he were having a good time.

"Oh, look! Look!" cried Vi. "Look at the funny mule!"

"He's a circus mule!" added Laddie. "See him kick up his heels! I could think of a funny riddle about him if I had time!"

"What do you s'pose is the matter?" asked Rose. "Were they trying to make the mule do some tricks, Russ?"

"I guess the mule did tricks without any making," her brother answered. "Oh, look at him kick up his heels!"

Indeed the canal animal was flying around in a circle, every now and then rising up on his forefeet and letting fly with his hind ones, and the men took good care to keep out of his way.

Then, with a loud bray, the mule started over toward the canal bank, and one of the men followed him, shouting to the animal to stop.

By this time Russ and the other children had reached the place of excitement. They saw their father and Captain Ben laughing, and then they knew nothing serious had happened.

"What was it? What made the mule kick up so funny? Was he a circus mule, and did he run back to the circus?" asked Vi, getting in all the questions possible in as short a time as she could.

"No, he wasn't exactly a circus mule, but he acted like one," her father answered. "Did any of you get kicked?" he inquired of the men around the automobile.

"No; but I come pretty near on to it," answered one of them. "He sure was a high performer."

"What happened?" asked Russ of Captain Ben.

"Yes, tell us," murmured Rose.

"As nearly as I can find out," said Captain Ben, "when your father and I went to dinner, after getting the auto as far out of the ditch as we could, some of the men from the canal decided they would hitch one of their mules to the car and see if he could pull it out. Mules are very strong, you know."

"Are they strong kickers, too?" asked Laddie.

"Indeed they are, very strong," Captain Ben answered. "Well, as I said, while we were down at Mrs. Brown's, getting our dinner, the men tried to hitch the mule to the auto that was still partly in the ditch. But the mule didn't like the work, for he began to kick out, and finally he broke loose and did as he pleased.

"That's the racket I heard as I was coming along the road," said the man who had run to Mr. Brown's to give the alarm. "I heard a mule braying and men shouting, and a boy told me about the auto accident a little while before. This boy said the man who owned the car was

at Brown's boarding house, so I ran there to tell you."

"I'm glad you did," said Daddy Bunker. "I'm sorry there was so much trouble, but I'm glad no one was hurt. I guess we can't depend on a mule for hauling our car out of the ditch."

"I guess not," said the canal boat man who had proposed using the long-eared animal. "General Sherman is all right, but he doesn't like to pull automobiles."

"Who's General Sherman?" asked Russ.

"That's my mule's name," answered the canal boat man.

"You children had better run back to Mr. Brown's now," said Daddy Bunker to Russ and the others. "We'll see what we can do toward getting the car out, though I don't see how we can travel any farther to-day. It means another night on the road."

"Oh, it's fun! I like it," said Rose.

"It will be all right if nobody walks in his sleep," added Russ.

"But I want to see mother and Mun Bun and Margy," said Vi, in a sad little voice.

"We'll see them to-morrow," promised her father. "And I talked to mother on the tele-

phone, so I know she's all right, and she knows we're all right."

Vi looked more cheerful on hearing this, and soon she and the others were ready to start back to Mr. Brown's pleasant farmhouse.

"Aren't you coming back with us, Daddy, and finish your dinner?" Laddie asked his father.

"We had enough," said Mr. Bunker.

"You didn't eat your pie," said Laddie.

"Well, then, I'll take two pieces at supper," said Mr. Bunker, and he laughed with Captain Ben.

The rest of the day passed quickly for the four little Bunkers and Tad Munson, who played with them around the barn and the farmhouse. Tad seemed happier, now that he had been promised a ride almost to the town near Grand View where he wanted to go. But with all his good-nature, there seemed to be something strange about this boy who had taken apples because he was hungry.

"I have my own ideas about that lad," is what Russ heard Mr. Brown saying to his wife when milking time came.

"What do you think," asked Mrs. Brown.

"I think he's been in some kind of trouble," went on the farmer. "Too bad, it is, for he seems like a nice lad."

Russ wondered what could be the matter with Tad.

Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben came up the road from the ditch where they had been working on the automobile. They looked tired, and they were very dirty.

"Did you get it out of the ditch?" asked Russ of his father.

"Yes," was the answer, "it's out of the ditch. And we managed to get it to a garage where we hope it will be fixed so we can go on in the morning."

"If we don't get to Grand View pretty soon," said Captain Ben, "I'm afraid the six little Bunkers will think I'm a pretty poor sort of a vacation planner. I haven't given you a very good time yet."

"Oh, we've had lots of fun!" Rose hastened to say.

"And the mule was awful funny the way he kicked up his heels," laughed Vi.

"I wish I could think of a riddle about him," said Laddie.

The others laughed at the little fellow, and then, when Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben had washed off as much of the oil and grease as possible, they all sat down to supper. Tad was with the four little Bunkers.

"Will you be ready to ride back to Grand View with us in the morning?" asked Captain Ben of the strange boy.

"Oh, yes, thank you," was the answer. "I want to get to Avalon as soon as I can."

After supper the visitors sat out on the broad porch in the pleasant shadows of evening. Mr. Brown was telling some simple riddles he knew, and Laddie was trying to guess them, when, suddenly, the farmer started from his chair and looked down toward the orchard.

"What's the matter?" asked his wife. "Do you see that red-haired boy after our fruit?"

"Well," said the farmer slowly, "it's a little too dark to see if he has red hair or not, but there's somebody down in my orchard. I'll go and take a look."

"Better be careful," warned his wife.

"I'm not afraid," was the answer, and he stepped quietly from the porch and walked off in the darkness.

"Maybe we'd better go with him," suggested Captain Ben. But just as he and Daddy Bunker were starting to follow the farmer, Mr. Brown came back.

"I reckon it was only some tramps sneaking around," he said. "But I'll turn old dog Major loose, and he'll drive 'em off if they try to rob my hen roost."

Russ, Rose and the others were so sleepy that they were sent to bed early by their father. Russ and Rose wondered if they would be disturbed as they had been the previous night by the little River children.

"You don't walk in your sleep, do you?" asked Russ of Tad, who was to have a little room to himself.

"No, I never did that I know of," he answered.

The night passed quietly, as far as the Bunker children knew, and they all slept soundly. Rose did wake up once during the night to get Vi a drink, and it was then that Rose heard the distant barking of a dog. But as this often happened, even at home, she did not wonder at it, and she soon went to sleep again.

The sun was shining brightly when she and the others awoke.

"Well, I didn't hear anybody walk in his sleep," said Russ with a laugh, as he came downstairs.

"All I heard was a dog barking," declared Rose.

"Where's Tad?" asked Captain Ben.

No one seemed to know. He had been given a room on the third floor.

"Guess I'd better go up and call him," said Captain Ben. "He may have overslept and we want to get an early start—that is, we do if the garage men have my car fixed. I'll call Tad."

He went upstairs, but came down with a queer look in his face.

"That's funny," he said.

"What is?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"Tad isn't in his room," answered Captain Ben. "And, what's more, his bed hasn't been slept in. Tad is missing!"

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE OLD LOG

EVERYBODY, even the four little Bunkers, was surprised to hear this.

"Tad missing!" exclaimed Daddy Bunker. "Are you sure he hasn't got up early to help with the chores?" and he looked at Mr. Brown, who had just come in to breakfast.

"No, he wasn't helping me," was the answer. "He did help with the chores last night. Said he was doing it to pay for his dinner and supper, and I must say he was spry about it, too. I'd like to have such a boy around the farm, and I asked him if he didn't want to work for me. But he said he wanted to get to Avalon, and that he was going to ride as far as Grand View with you folks this morning."

"I did promise to take him," said Captain

Ben; "but he seems to have made an early start to get ahead of us."

"I'm sorry for the poor fellow," said Mrs. Brown. "But if he's gone, he's gone, and that's all there is to it. My private opinion is that Tad ran away from home, and now he's anxious to run back again. That's what I think."

"I think so, too," said her husband. "Well, he seems able to take care of himself, and I'm glad he wasn't an apple thief; anyhow he only took a few to keep from starving, and I didn't begrudge him those. Now let's get breakfast. I suppose you folks are anxious about your auto."

"Yes," said Captain Ben. "Though the garage man said he'd work on it all night to get it ready for me this morning. I'll go down directly after breakfast."

The meal was soon on the table, and the hungry little Bunkers ate with good appetites. At first they had felt sorry about Tad's absence, but they soon forgot about him in thinking of the fun of traveling again in Captain Ben's car.

"And we'll see mother and Mun Bun and

Margy to-night," said Rose, as she hummed a merry song.

"I'll be glad!" cried Russ, and he whistled, while a catbird in a tree outside tried to imitate him. Catbirds are relatives of the mocking birds, and they often imitate other birds, just as the mocking birds do.

"You children stay here while Captain Ben and I go to the garage to see if the car is ready," directed Daddy Bunker, as he and the marine started off.

They had hardly reached the front gate before Mrs. Brown came running out on the porch. She seemed much excited, and was waving her hands in the air as Norah had waved hers the time the Bunker chimney caught fire.

"Wait a minute!" she called to Captain Ben and Mr. Bunker.

"What's the matter?" asked the children's father. "Have you found the missing Tad?"

"No. But some of my things are missing, too!" exclaimed the farmer's wife. "I left a box of my jewelry on the table at the head of my bed. Now it's gone—my box of jewelry is gone!"

"You don't say so!" cried her husband, who had heard what his wife said. "Your box of rings gone, and those ear rings I gave you! I know what happened! That boy Tad took 'em and skipped off in the night! That's the reason he didn't sleep in his bed. He took my wife's things!"

The four little Bunkers stared.

"Hm," said Captain Ben slowly. "It seems hard to accuse a boy of anything like that, but it does look bad for him. Where were your things, Mrs. Brown?"

The farmer's wife showed them her bedroom on the first floor, as is the case in many old-fashioned country houses.

"I always put my box of jewelry on the table at the head of my bed," Mrs. Brown explained. "That's so I can run out quickly with it in case of fire."

"And it's also very easy for some one to reach in from the outside and take it," said Daddy Bunker. "Was this window open?" he asked, pointing to the one at the head of Mrs. Brown's bed.

"Yes," she answered. "It was a hot night, so I left the window open."

Mr. Bunker looked at the ground beneath the window.

"That's how it happened," he said. "Some one has been walking around under the window. I can see the footmarks in the ground, which is still soft from the rain. Whoever it was, came here, reached in through the open window from outside, and took the jewelry."

"It must have been that boy Tad!" said the farmer.

"Let's have a look at the footprints in the dirt," suggested Captain Ben.

All of them, including the four little Bunkers, went out under the window. Daddy Bunker allowed no one to walk too near, as he said he wanted to see how many footmarks there were. After he had looked he said:

"There was only one person here in the night. Whether it was the boy Tad or not, I can't say. The footprints aren't very big, and might have been made by a boy with large feet or a man with small feet."

"Tad's feet were big," said Rose. "Or, anyhow, he had on big shoes. He said they didn't belong to him, but they were the best he could find."

"Wait a minute now, before we get to thinking Tad did this," said Captain Ben. "Weren't there some tramps around last night, Mr. Brown?"

"Well, there was somebody in my orchard," answered the farmer. "I reckon they were tramps."

"Maybe one of the tramps took your wife's box of jewelry from your room," went on the marine.

"I never thought of them!" said Mrs. Brown. "I don't want to lose my nice jewelry, but I'd rather it was taken by tramps than by Tad. He seemed to be a nice boy!"

"Maybe it isn't stolen at all," suggested Russ. "Once my mother thought her watch was stolen and she found it afterward in the bathroom."

"Well, I wish I could find my wrist watch," said Captain Ben.

"Was that taken, too, last night?" asked Mr. Brown.

"No, I missed that when we were packing to take the six little Bunkers to my bungalow at Grand View," was the answer. "I guess I'll never find my watch. But it is possible that

you may have put your jewelry somewhere else, Mrs. Brown. We'd better look."

But the farmer's wife was sure she had placed the box on the table at the head of her bed near the open window, and a search all through the house did not bring it to light. So the jewelry was gone, and Tad was gone, and there was no sign of the tramps.

Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben helped in the search for the missing rings and other things, and when they could not be found they went down after the automobile. It had been repaired so it would go again, and soon the four little Bunkers and their father and the marine were ready to travel on again.

"If you see anything of Tad or some tramps, ask them if they have my jewelry," called the farmer's wife to the little party as they started off.

"We will," promised Russ.

Once more they were on the way. The weather was fine, and the roads firm and Captain Ben's automobile was almost as good as before it had gone head-first into the ditch by the canal.

"I almost forget how mother and Mun Bun

and Margy look," said Rose, as they were on the last stage of their journey.

"Yes, though it is only two days since we have seen them, it seems much longer," said her father. "But we'll all be together this evening, and then for some glorious times!"

"Hurray!" cried Laddie. "I'm going to think up a lot of new riddles, too!"

They stopped at a wayside spring to get a drink. The spring was not far from a farmhouse, and as Russ, Rose and the other children were looking at the flowers in the front yard they noticed a dog barking at a big log which lay in a meadow not far from the road.

"Is that your dog?" asked Russ of a farm boy who came out to look at the automobile party.

"Yes," was the answer. "And he's been barking around that log all morning. I guess maybe something's inside. Maybe a groundhog is in there."

"Oh, I'd love to see a groundhog!" exclaimed Rose. "Let's go up and look!"

"All right," agreed Russ. "May we?" he asked his father, who was talking to the farmer while Captain Ben was oiling one of the springs

of the car where a squeak had sounded since they started.

"Yes; but be careful," cautioned Mr. Bunker. "It may be a skunk instead of a groundhog that the dog is barking at."

"Oh, I don't believe so," said the farm boy. "Come on!" he called to the Bunker children, and they approached the big log in the field.

"It's hollow," said Russ, as they neared it.

"Yes, it's been there a good many years," the farm boy said. "Sometimes, when my sister and I are playing hide and seek, I crawl in there. What's the matter, Towser?" he asked his dog, who was barking louder than ever. "What's in the log?"

Russ stooped down and looked through it. He straightened up suddenly.

"There is something in it," he said. "And it's something that wears shoes! I can see 'em!"

CHAPTER XV

THE BUNKERS GET TOGETHER

Russ Bunker quickly drew back away from the end of the log after he had stooped down and had seen "something with shoes," as he said.

"Maybe it's a bear!" said Vi.

"Pooh! How could a bear wear shoes?" asked Laddie.

"Well, I don't care!" exclaimed Vi. "I saw a bear in a circus once, and he wore roller skates. And if a bear can wear roller skates I guess a bear can wear shoes."

"There aren't any bears around here," said the farm boy. "Let me take a look."

He stooped down as Russ had done, and looked within the log for some little time, the dog, meanwhile, leaping around and barking.

"Do you see anything?" asked Russ.

"Yes, I do," answered the farm boy. "I see

something with shoes on, and I see two legs and I see——"

Just then there was a movement inside the log, the dog barked louder than ever, and then, from the other end of the fallen, hollow tree came—the missing boy Tad!

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Russ, Rose, and Laddie in turn. As for Vi, she had just opened her mouth to ask a question and she was so surprised that she forgot what it was, and she had no time to cry "Oh!" as did the others.

As for Tad, he brushed off some of the dry, rotten wood that clung to his clothes, and then he stood looking at the four little Bunkers, at the farm boy, and at the dog. The dog went up, smelled of Tad's legs, and, seeming to count him as a friend, stopped barking.

"How'd you get in there?" asked Russ.

"I crawled in to rest and sleep," was the answer. "I'd been walking nearly all night, except I got a ride on a milk wagon part of the way."

"What made you run away from Mr. Brown's?" asked Rose.

"Oh, I was in a hurry to get—I just wanted

to get away, and I didn't want to wait all night till you folks started in the morning," was the hesitating answer. "I was afraid maybe your auto wouldn't work, and I was in a hurry. So I started off by myself."

"Didn't you go to bed?" asked Rose.

"No," answered Tad.

Just then Daddy Bunker, who had finished his talk with the farmer, while Captain Ben was oiling the automobile spring, called:

"Come, children! We must be moving!"

"Look! We found Tad!" cried Laddie.

"In a hollow log!" added Vi.

Mr. Bunker and Captain Ben, looking up and seeing the missing boy, hurried to the children.

"So you thought you'd rather travel on by yourself, did you?" asked Daddy Bunker.

"Yes, sir. I was in a hurry," was the answer. "I went up to the room where I was to sleep, but I got to thinking I could travel all night, on account of having so many good things to eat. So I sneaked out when nobody was looking, and I walked along. I got a ride part of the way on a milk wagon, and walked the rest. It was almost daylight when I got

here, and I saw this hollow log, so I crawled in and went to sleep."

Daddy Bunker walked closer to the tramp boy, for that is what he really seemed now.

"Tad," said the children's father kindly, "I am going to ask you a question, but I don't want you to feel bad about it. This morning, when we awoke and found you gone, there was also something else missing from Mr. Brown's house. It was his wife's box of jewelry. Now, Tad——"

"I didn't take it! I didn't take a thing!" cried Tad earnestly. "I just went away by myself because I was in a hurry to get to Avalon, and I was afraid maybe your auto would break down. I didn't take Mrs. Brown's jewelry! I never even saw it! I've been a bad boy in some ways," he went on, "but the only thing I took was some apples, and you saw me have them. And I wouldn't have taken them only I was so terribly hungry! I never stole any jewelry—honest I didn't!"

He looked at Mr. Bunker with clear, bright eyes, and tears began to come into them.

"Tad, I believe you," said Mr. Bunker.

"So do I!" exclaimed Captain Ben. "I pre-

sume it was those tramps, or one of them, who reached in the window and took the jewelry box. I'm glad it was not you, Tad. And, now that we have found you and the auto is all right again, don't you want to ride with us the rest of the way?"

"Yes, thank you, I'd like to," was the answer.

"Did you have any breakfast?" asked Vi. "We had some lovely pancakes at Mrs. Brown's."

"No, I didn't have any," Tad answered.

"My mother'll give you something," offered the farm boy.

"I think we might all stop for lunch if your mother will sell us a meal," said Daddy Bunker.

"Yes, she sometimes gets a meal for autoists," the boy answered.

Soon the Bunker children, with the newly-found Tad, Daddy, and Captain Ben were sitting down to a nice lunch.

"We've had a terrible lot of adventures since we started," said Rose, as she took a second piece of cake which the farmer's wife offered.

"Yes," agreed Russ. "It's been a lot of

fun—a heap sight more fun than going to school."

"But you'll have to go to school when we get back from Captain Ben's," said Daddy Bunker.

"That'll be a long while, and we'll have a lot of fun before we go," laughed Russ.

"Did you think of any riddles when you slept out in that log all night?" asked Laddie of Tad, when it was time to start again.

"No, I can't say I did," was the answer. "All I thought of was getting back to—back to Avalon, and I wondered where I'd get my breakfast. I didn't think I'd sleep until nearly noon. Now I've had my breakfast and dinner all in one," and he looked at his emptied plate.

A little later the four little Bunkers, with Tad, Captain Ben and Daddy were on the road once more. All went well and they arrived at the seashore bungalow in Grand View without any more accidents.

"Oh, Mother, I'm so glad to see you!" cried Rose, as the car came to a stop in front of Captain Ben's pretty summer home not far from the beach.

"And I'm glad to see you, my darlings!"

cried Mother Bunker. "It seems a week since I've had you. My, what a lot of things must have happened!"

"They did — lots!" said Russ. "And, Mother, this is Tad, and he lives in Avalon."

"And Mr. Brown thought he was a pesky apple boy but he wasn't," said Vi. "He only took a few 'cause he was hungry."

"I wants an apple!" said Mun Bun, as he scampered around his brothers and sisters.

"And I want two apples!" said Margy.

Mrs. Bunker wanted Tad to stay to supper, but he said he had some relatives in Avalon, the next town, which could soon be reached by a trolley car. So he left, after thanking the Bunkers, and saying he would come over to see them soon.

"There's something queer about that boy," said Mr. Bunker, when Tad had gone to the trolley station. "I believe he has run away from home and is anxious to get back."

"Do you think he had anything to do with taking the jewelry?" asked his wife.

"No," was the answer, "I do not. I believe the tramps took it."

"You didn't find my wrist watch in any of

the things you unpacked, did you?" asked Captain Ben of Mrs. Bunker.

"No," was the answer, "I did not. It's too bad you had to lose it."

There was a happy time when all the Bunkers were united again.

"We'll all be bunked together to-night—the Bunkers will bunk together," said the children's mother, as she made up the beds, or "bunks," as Captain Ben called them. Before going to bed the children who had made the automobile trip told most of what had happened during their journey from the time they were caught in the storm and were awakened by the sleep-walking Jack until they left Mr. Brown's.

"What kind of a time did you have?" asked Daddy Bunker of his wife. "You didn't lose Mun Bun or Margy on the way down here, that's sure."

"No, we hadn't a bit of trouble," she said. "We got here in good time, though of course I missed you and the children."

So the Bunkers were put in their bunks, and soon they were all asleep. It was some time past midnight, as they learned later, when Mr.

Bunker and Captain Ben heard a knock at the bungalow front door.

"Hello, who's there?" called the captain, turning on the electric light, for his bungalow was almost like a city home in some respects. "Who's there and what do you want?" asked the marine.

"Maybe it's tramps," said Laddie to Russ, with whom he was sleeping. The two boys had been awakened by the knock.

"Tramps wouldn't knock," Russ said. "Maybe it's a telegram, or maybe somebody is lost and wants to know the way."

Russ heard Captain Ben get up and go to the door.

"Who's there?" asked the marine again.

"Have you seen anything of a boy named Tad Munson?" was the question asked. "I heard he came on with you in an auto, and I'm looking for him. Have you seen Tad Munson?"

CHAPTER XVI

AN UNEXPECTED RIDE

MOTHER and Daddy Bunker, who with Laddie, Russ and Rose, had also been awakened by the knock on the bungalow door, heard Captain Ben quickly open the door when that question came.

"Tad Munson!" exclaimed the captain. "He was with us this evening. He stayed here to supper and got on a trolley car to go to some relatives in Avalon, he said. Who are you?" went on the captain, and those who were listening heard some one come into the bungalow from outside.

"I'm Tad's father," was the answer. "I've been looking for him some time, and to-night I heard he was seen over here in Grand View. I traced him to you folks, but now you tell me he's gone again."

"Yes, he started for Avalon," went on Cap-

tain Ben, while Russ, who was listening, wondered how it felt to be away from your home and all one's family.

"Well, if Tad started for home he never got there—at least he hadn't when I left, about two hours ago," said Mr. Munson. "Poor, foolish boy! I feel sorry for him!"

"Did he run away from home?" asked Captain Ben.

By this time Mr. Bunker had got up, slipped on a bath robe, and was now with the two other men. Russ, Rose, Laddie and their mother still listened to the talk, which could plainly be heard. Vi, Mun Bun and Margy were sound asleep in their beds.

"Yes, Tad ran away," said Mr. Munson. "He was a little bad, but not very, and I said I'd have to punish him. I wasn't going to whip him, or anything like that, but I was going to take his bicycle away from him and not let him ride it for a week. But he is a foolish, quick-tempered boy, and he didn't wait to see what I was going to do. He just rode off on his wheel, and I haven't seen him nor heard from him since."

"But he started for home," said Daddy

Bunker. "We brought him as far as here, and he said he could go the rest of the way on the trolley car."

"Didn't he have his bicycle?" asked Mr. Munson.

"No, he was on foot when we first saw him in a farmer's apple orchard," Captain Ben answered.

"Then he must have sold his wheel to get money to live on," remarked Tad's father. "And, I suppose, after he started back home, and perhaps even got on the trolley car, he was afraid to come back on account of not having his bicycle. So he must have run away again."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Captain Ben. "How did you come to learn he had been with us?" he asked Mr. Munson.

"Oh, I've been searching for my boy ever since he ran away," answered Tad's father. "I come over here to Grand View every day to make inquiries. This evening I heard that my boy had been seen in an automobile. I made inquiries, and learned you were the only folks who had come to town in an auto with some children, so I came here as soon as I

could. I'm sorry I had to wake you up in the middle of the night."

"Oh, that's all right," said Captain Ben. "I'm sorry about your boy. If I had known he felt afraid to go home alone, I'd have taken him over in my car."

"Maybe he'll come back in the morning, after he spends another night alone," said the father. "Tad is a queer boy. I don't exactly understand him, I feel sometimes. Well, if he isn't here I suppose I might as well go back home."

"I'm sorry," said Captain Ben. "Won't you stay the rest of the night, it's so late?"

"No, I'd better get back," was the answer. "If you see anything of my boy just send him back home and say I'll forget and forgive everything."

"We will," promised Daddy Bunker. "I think he may be hiding out around here somewhere, as we found him hiding in the hollow log."

"Did he do that?" asked Mr. Munson.

"Yes," answered Mr. Bunker, and he and Captain Ben told all they knew about the runaway boy. Then Mr. Munson left, the three

little Bunkers who had awakened to listen to the talk went to sleep again, and the bungalow was quiet once more.

"Did you find Tad?" asked Laddie, as soon as he was up next morning.

"Oh, ho, you little tykes! So you were awake, were you?" asked their father, with a laugh, as he pulled Vi's hair playfully. "No, poor Tad doesn't seem to be around here, but I think he'll be all right."

"And you mustn't worry about him and spoil your extra vacation at my place," said Captain Ben. "You came to Grand View to have a good time, and I came to forget about the war. I want you to be as happy as you can. Come along, as soon as you've had breakfast, and we'll go out on the water."

"Oh, it's just a lovely place here!" exclaimed Rose, as she looked from the window. "Are all those your boats there?" and she pointed to several craft floating near a dock that extended out into a small bay.

"Not all of them," said Captain Ben. "I have a motor boat and two rowboats. I'm going to take you for a motor-boat ride this morning."

"That'll be fun!" cried Laddie.

"Well, be ready to start in half an hour," went on Captain Ben, and he thrust out his arm and glanced down at his wrist. "There I go again!" he exclaimed. "Looking for my watch that's lost! I don't seem to get used to being without it."

"It is too bad," said Mother Bunker. "I did hope I might find it among the things when I unpacked, but it wasn't there."

"Oh, never mind," and Captain Ben laughed, trying to show that he did not feel bad. "We won't worry about it any more than we'll worry about Tad. They may both turn up together some day."

"And maybe we'll find Mrs. Brown's jewelry," added Russ.

"Not much chance of that," remarked his father. "I imagine the tramps took the box of rings and other things, and Mrs. Brown will never see them again."

"Oh, that's too bad!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker, who knew how Mrs. Brown must feel at losing her keepsakes.

But, as Captain Ben had said, the grown folks did not want the six little Bunkers to

worry over matters which could not be helped, and so spoil their late vacation.

"May we go down and play on the beach while we're waiting for Captain Ben to take us out in the motor boat?" asked Rose of her mother, when breakfast was finished.

"Yes," was the answer. "And look after Mun Bun and Margy. I think they'll be careful, but watch them just the same."

Rose promised, and soon the six little Bunkers were shouting and laughing on the sands of the bay which came up almost to Captain Ben's bungalow at Grand View. The bungalow stood on a little hill, at the foot of which was the water. This water was the bay, and, farther out, was the big ocean. On the bay were many boats, for it was a place of shelter during storms. Not far from the bungalow was a pier that extended out into the water, and the captain's rowboats, motor boat, as well as the boats belonging to several other bungalow and cottage owners, were tied near by.

"I think this is the loveliest place!" exclaimed Rose, as she sat down on the sand and looked out across the water.

"Yes, it's dandy," replied Russ. "And this is the nicest part of the year. I'm glad we don't have to go back to school right away."

"Can I make some sand pies?" asked Mun Bun, coming up to Rose with some shells in his hand.

"Yes, make all you want, but don't get wet," Rose warned him.

"I'm going to make pies, too," said Margy, and soon the two youngest children were busy playing in the sand.

Russ walked up and down the beach looking for odd shells, for he had started to make a collection of them. Rose remained on the sand, watching some men who were working on a motor boat. She saw that Mun Bun and Margy were all right, and the last she had heard from Laddie and Vi was when Laddie was trying to guess the answer to a riddle about seaweed. It was a riddle which Laddie had made up himself, and perhaps it was not as easy as some other riddle would have been.

At any rate, Laddie and Vi were talking about this riddle the last Rose heard them. She was thinking how nice it was to be at Grand View, and she was wondering if

Captain Ben would ever find his lost watch when she was suddenly startled by a scream. That it came from one of the little Bunkers Rose knew at once, and her first glance was toward Mun Bun and Margy. They were still playing quietly on the sand.

Rose next looked for Laddie and Violet and, to her surprise, she saw them in a rowboat some distance from shore, and the rowboat was being pulled along by the motor craft on which the men had been working. Most unexpectedly Laddie and Vi were being ridden out on the broad bay!

"Oh, come back! Come back!" cried Rose, springing to her feet and waving her hands to her brother and sister. "Come back here!"

"We can't! We can't come back!" cried Laddie, and then he and Vi fell down in a huddled heap in the middle of the rowboat which was being pulled rapidly along by the motor boat.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RAGGED MEN

Russ Bunker, who had been walking along the shore gathering pretty shells, looked back as he heard Rose scream.

"What's the matter?" shouted Russ. Rose pointed to the rowboat out in the middle of the bay, in which could be seen Vi and Laddie. The two small Bunkers were clinging to one another, and were still being towed, in their boat, by the motor craft. They were not so very far from shore, but far enough to cause them to be frightened, and also to frighten Rose and Russ. As for Mun Bun and Margy, they were too small to be really worried, though they wondered why Laddie and Vi had gone off in a boat by themselves, especially having a motor boat pull them along.

And this was just what Rose and Russ were also wondering. Russ ran back to Rose.

"What made them go off in a boat like that?" asked Russ.

"I don't know," Rose answered. "I thought they were all right, and then, when I looked again, I saw them there. And they want to come back, but they can't!"

"Oh, maybe the men in the motor boat are taking them away!" Russ exclaimed, for there were two men in the boat that was towing the smaller craft. But these men did not seem to be paying any attention to the two children in the rowboat behind them. The two men were up in the front of their craft, and appeared to be working at the stearing wheel.

"Come back! Come back!" cried Russ, holding his hand to his mouth to make a sort of funnel, or megaphone, as he had often seen the fishermen do, and also the cowboys on Uncle Fred's ranch.

Across the water came faintly to the ears of Rose and Russ the sobs and cries of Laddie and Vi in the rowboat.

"Those men are taking 'em away!" cried Rose. "What shall we do?"

Just then Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker came down from the bungalow, up on the hill,

to the beach where the children had gone to play. At once the two men saw that something was the matter. Then they noticed the two little Bunkers out in the boat.

"Who let them go?" cried Daddy Bunker.

"Nobody let them go," said Russ. "Those men are taking them away!"

Captain Ben laughed when he heard this.

"Those men in the motor boat are friends of mine," he said. "They are trying their boat, after having fixed it, and I guess Laddie and Vi asked them for a ride and they're getting a tow."

But just as Captain Ben said this the two men who had been in the front part, or bow, of the motor boat, turned around, and seemed, for the first time, to become aware that they were towing a rowboat with two children in it. One man called to the other, and then the two of them walked back to the stern, where the rope of the rowboat was fastened. Then the motor boat went more slowly.

"I see how it is," said Captain Ben. "When Mr. Thompson and Mr. Wade were in their boat, fixing it, Laddie and Vi must have come up at the stern, making no noise. The chil-

dren fastened their rowboat to the motor boat and were taken for a ride before they knew it. This is the first my friends knew they had children towing behind them."

This part, at least, seemed to be true, and those on shore could see the two men in the motor boat lifting Laddie and Vi out of the small craft into the larger one. Then the motor boat was headed toward shore, and the two little Bunkers were soon with the rest of the family.

"We gave them a ride without knowing it," said Mr. Thompson, when Laddie and Vi were over their fright at being carried off, as they thought.

"What made you fasten your boat to the motor boat, and why did you get in the rowboat at all?" asked Daddy Bunker, a bit sternly.

"We just wanted to sit in the boat a minute," explained Laddie. "I was trying to think of a riddle about a boat, and I thought maybe I could think of a better one if I got in one, and so did Vi, and then we got a ride and we got scared."

"Did you get into a boat and row out to

the motor boat?" asked their father, in surprise.

"I'll tell you how it must have happened," said Mr. Wade. "This boat tied to the stern of the motor craft is ours. We kept it tied so we could row back and forth while we were fixing our big boat. We pulled up our anchor to get ready to take a trial ride, and our rowboat must have swung in near the dock. Then the children must have got in when we weren't looking, and we started off. Our engine made so much noise that we didn't hear their cries or the shouts of the children on shore, for both Mr. Thompson and I were up forward fixing the steering wheel."

"Is that how it happened?" asked Captain Ben of Laddie.

"Yes," answered the little boy. "We got in the little boat and it was fast with a rope to the big boat, and then we began to move, and I couldn't think of any riddle at all."

"Well, you'd better keep out of boats unless your mother or I or Captain Ben is with you," said Daddy Bunker, and the children promised.

"Now I'll take you all for a ride in my motor boat," offered Captain Ben, when the excite-

ment had quieted down. "We'll take a trip around the bay."

Mother Bunker put up a lunch for the children, and they were soon in Captain Ben's big motor boat, speeding over the blue waters of the bay. Daddy and Mother Bunker also went along.

"Are there any nice places to have picnics here?" asked Rose of the captain, as she sat near him at the steering wheel.

"Oh, yes, lots of places," he answered. "There are some cute little islands in the bay, and we'll go camping on one some day."

"That will be lovely!" exclaimed Rose.

Laddie was so interested in watching the water slip along at the side of the swift motor boat that he forgot about his riddle, though Vi did not forget to ask questions, and finally her mother said:

"Here, take that!"

The "that" was a molasses cookie, and in munching it Vi forgot about the questions for a time. Or rather, her mouth was too full to ask any.

The merry party went ashore after about an hour's ride, the captain steering the boat into

a little cove, and back from the sandy shore a little way was a clump of trees.

"Are we going to eat our lunch in there?" asked Rose.

"Yes," her mother answered, and soon they had spread out their picnic lunch.

"We'll have a picnic like this on an island some day," promised Captain Ben.

"And shall we have more to eat?" asked Russ.

"Why, isn't there enough here?" his father inquired, with a laugh.

"Oh, there's enough for now," Russ answered. "But if we go to an island we could pretend we were shipwrecked, and then we'd be hungry and want a lot to eat."

While the captain and Daddy and Mother Bunker sat under the shade of the trees and talked, the four older Bunker children wandered around the little grove, after having eaten the "snack," as the marine had called it. Mun Bun and Margy stayed near their mother.

Russ was digging away in the soft earth, to get a queer-looking stone which he wanted to add to his collection of shells, and Rose was

watching some ants which were busily at work, when suddenly Laddie, who had wandered off down a little path, came running back, with Vi just ahead of him. Rose at once saw that something was the matter.

"What is it, Laddie? Did you see a snake?" she asked.

The little fellow, who was out of breath, shook his head.

"Nope! I didn't see—a snake," he answered. "But I saw—a lot—of ragged men—hiding in the bushes, and Vi saw 'em too. Didn't you, Vi? A lot of ragged men!"

"Were they tramps?" asked Rose quickly, as she took hold of Vi's hand.

"I guess so," Laddie answered. "They were terribly ragged men! I'm going back to daddy and mother!" he added.

CHAPTER XVIII

MORE THINGS GONE

Rose Bunker gave one look toward the thick clump of trees, through which wound a path, along which Laddie and Vi had gone for a little distance.

"Come on!" exclaimed Rose, taking her small brother and sister by their hands. "We'll all go back to daddy and mother."

Russ, who was still looking for stones, and any other curious things he could pick up, glanced toward the other three Bunkers.

"Where are you going?" Russ wanted to know.

"Back home. I mean back to daddy, mother and Captain Ben," explained Rose.

"What for?"

"'Cause I saw a lot of ragged men in the bushes," answered Laddie. "They were awful

ragged, and they had a fire, and some of 'em were asleep, and——"

"Tramps!" exclaimed Russ, and he started toward the path, down which Laddie had pointed as leading to the place where he had seen the tramps. "I'm going to look at 'em!"

"No, you're not!" cried Rose. "You're coming right back with us, Russ Bunker, or I'll tell father on you!" and she spoke in a low but very earnest voice. Russ looked at her a moment, and then at the dark clump of trees.

"Yes, I guess I'll go back with you," he said. "I'll take you back, and then daddy and Captain Ben and I will come back here and drive the tramps away."

"Daddy won't let you," said Rose; and, in his heart, Russ believed his sister was right.

"Come on!" exclaimed Vi. "I don't want any of the ragged men to get me."

"Oh, they won't get you. See! Daddy and mother and Captain Ben are right down there," and Rose pointed to where the others of the picnic party could be seen in the grove on the beach.

"My! What's the matter? Did you see a cow?" asked Captain Ben, with a smile, when

the four children came hurrying back from their excursion.

"I saw some ragged men!" exclaimed Laddie.

"I saw 'em too—and I don't like 'em! They were tramps!" declared Vi. "And maybe they were the same tramps that took Mrs. Brown's jewelry."

"Oh, I hardly think so," said Mrs. Bunker. But daddy and Captain Ben looked at each other, and then both men rose quickly to their feet.

"Tramps, eh?" said Captain Ben in a low voice. "We don't want any such around here. And I don't believe the other cottagers know it. Let's go and take a look," he said to Mr. Bunker.

"Can't I come?" asked Russ.

"No, you stay with mother," his father answered.

"There! I told you they wouldn't let you!" exclaimed Rose.

"Well, I don't care. Maybe some tramps will come here, and I can drive 'em away," declared Russ. "I'm going to get a lot of stones to throw at 'em!"

"You won't need to!" laughed his mother.

"No tramps will come here, and it may have been only some fishermen you saw. Fishermen sometimes wear ragged clothes."

"These weren't fishermen, 'cause they didn't have any fishes," declared Laddie.

"Maybe they didn't have any luck, or else perhaps they hadn't yet gone fishing," his mother answered. "Anyhow, we'll leave the tramps, if such they were, to daddy and Captain Ben. And it will soon be time for us to get back to the bungalow."

"Is there anything more to eat?" Russ wanted to know.

"Not even some cookie crumbs," said his mother. "I threw them to the birds and squirrels. But when we go on the picnic to the island we'll take more lunch along."

"I hope we do," sighed Russ, "'cause I'm hungry right now."

The children sat around their mother while daddy and Captain Ben walked toward the grove where Laddie had seen the tramps.

"Do you suppose they could be the same ones who took Mrs. Brown's things, Mother?" asked Rose.

"They might be," her mother replied.

"Though Mr. Brown's farm is some distance from here and I don't see how the tramps could arrive here so soon."

"They could if they had an auto like Captain Ben's,'" said Laddie.

"Pooh! Tramps don't have autos. Do they, Mother?" scoffed Vi.

"Not very often, I imagine," was the answer. "But don't think about the ragged men any more."

"Do you think they could have taken Captain Ben's watch?" persisted Laddie.

"No, of course not!" his mother quickly replied. "Captain Ben's watch was lost somewhere near our house, and that's almost a hundred miles from here. Besides, there were no tramps there."

"Well, anyhow, maybe the tramps took Tad Munson," suggested Laddie, who seemed bound to have the ragged men up to some mischief.

"No, poor Tad ran away by himself," Mrs. Bunker answered. "I feel very sorry for him, and I hope he is safe at home again by this time. We must go over to Avalon some day and find out."

A little later Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker came back.

"Did you catch 'em?" asked Russ eagerly.

"No, they had gone. I guess you children scared them away," replied the marine.

"Were there really tramps there?" asked Mrs. Bunker.

"Yes, we found a place where they had made a sort of camp," was the answer of her husband. "They had built a fire and had been cooking something in empty tomato cans. Whether they took alarm as we approached, or left because they heard the children talking, I don't know; but the place was deserted."

"I'm glad our bungalow isn't near here," said Mrs. Bunker.

"Yes, I don't like tramps myself," remarked Captain Ben. "I'll tell the police of this place, and have them watch. Lots of cottagers and bungalow owners will soon be leaving and closing their places for the winter, and it is then that tramps often break in and take things. The police must be told, and they will be on the watch."

The six little Bunkers, with their father, mother, and Captain Ben, were soon in the

motor boat again and on their way to the bungalow. The children talked so much about the ragged men, or the tramps, as they called them, that at length Mrs. Bunker said very firmly:

"Now, my dears, please stop! First you know you'll be dreaming about these poor men, and then, perhaps, some of you will walk in your sleep, as the little River boy did."

"It must be fun to walk in your sleep!" laughed Laddie.

"You did it once, when you were smaller," said his father.

"I did!" cried Laddie. "Did I do anything funny?"

"Yes," went on Mr. Bunker, laughing. "It was in the winter, and mother had just got you a new pair of red mittens. You had played out in the snow with them, and after supper you put them behind the stove in the kitchen to dry.

"Then you went to bed, but later in the evening, when Norah was fixing the fire for the night, you came tramping down the back stairs. You frightened Nora, and when she asked you what you wanted you didn't say a

word. You just took your little red mittens and carried them back up the stairs to bed with you."

"I did!" exclaimed Laddie. "I never knew it."

"No, when a person walks in his sleep he generally doesn't know what he is doing," his father concluded.

That evening Captain Ben gave the children a box of marshmallow candies, and they had a fire on the beach to roast them. The children thought this was great fun.

The sailor had cut long sticks for the children. The sticks were sharply pointed on one end, and when the fire had burned down, so there was a good bed of hot, glowing coals, Mother Bunker said:

"Now each of you put a marshmallow on the sharp end of your sticks and hold it over the coals. Be careful not to hold them too close, and don't let the candies catch fire, as they sometimes do if you are not careful."

"I know how, 'cause I've roasted marshmallows before," said Rose.

"So've I. And once my candy caught fire," remarked Russ.

"Oh, look at mine blaze!" suddenly cried Laddie.

"Take it away from the fire, and blow out the blaze!" Captain Ben called. "Burned candies aren't good to eat."

Laddie tried to do as he was told, but he got so excited that his father had to blow for him. After that Laddie was more careful. Mother helped Mun Bun and Margy to roast their marshmallows, and soon they were all eating the dainties, seated on flat pieces of drift-wood gathered along the beach.

The moon rose out of the sea, as it appeared, and the view was a beautiful one. Then Rose started a song, and they all joined in the chorus, while Russ whistled—but first, he had to swallow a marshmallow he was chewing.

"Oh, I just love it here," said Rose, when the song was finished.

"Yes, Captain Ben was very good to ask us to his seashore bungalow," said Daddy Bunker.

"Oh, I'm having just as much fun out of it as you folks!" declared the marine. "I wanted a jolly crowd here with me to help me forget about the war."

They sang more songs, Captain Ben told

some funny stories, Laddie asked one or two riddles, and I am afraid to say just how many questions Vi asked, but it was a large number. Finally Mother Bunker said:

"It's time we went in, I think. Mun Bun and Margy are almost asleep. Come, Mun Bun," she called to the little boy. "Time you were in by-low land."

"Yes, I want to go to bed," murmured Mun Bun, who was really almost asleep. He tried to get up on his feet, off the broad, flat board on which he had been sitting on the sand while the marshmallows were being roasted, but it seemed as though he could not stand up.

"Come, Mun Bun!" called his mother. "Come along!"

"I—I can't come!" the little fellow answered. "I can't stand on my legs."

"What's the matter? Is your foot asleep?" asked his father. You know that sometimes happens if you sit with your legs cramped.

"No, it isn't my feet, but I just can't get up," went on Mun Bun. "I guess I'm sewed fast to the board."

"Sewed fast to the board!" cried his mother. "What does the child mean?"

"I'm fast!" went on Mun Bun, and when he did manage to stand up the board, on which he had been sitting, came up with him, fast to the seat of his little trousers.

"Oh, it must be caught on a nail!" said Rose. "You've sat on a nail, Mun Bun!"

"No, I didn't sit on a nail," said the little fellow. "But I guess it's something else. It's soft and sticky!"

His mother hurried over toward him. By the light of the beach fire she looked him over.

"Why, Mun Bun!" cried Mrs. Bunker, "you've sat in a lot of the marshmallow candies, and that's why the board is sticking fast to you. Look!" She pulled the piece of drift wood loose from the little fellow's trousers. A wad of candy came with it.

"Well, I thought it was something funny," said Mun Bun, as the others laughed. "I put some of my candies on the board and then I forgot 'em, and I just squashed myself down on top of 'em, didn't I?" he asked.

"You surely did!" laughed his father.

However, not much damage was done, as Mun Bun's trousers were the kind that could be washed. So after the laughter was over

and the fire had been put out, so no embers would scatter in the night and cause a blaze, the party strolled up to the bungalow and went to bed, crawling into the bunks which Captain Ben had built like those on a ship.

Laddie rather hoped he might walk in his sleep again, but he did not. The night passed quietly, but when Rose and Russ, who were the first of the children up, came downstairs they saw their father, mother and Captain Ben out on the porch. The marine was rather excited.

"I was afraid something like this would happen after I heard about the tramps," he said.

"What has happened?" asked Russ.

"A number of things have been taken from Captain Ben's dock," explained Daddy Bunker. "There have been thieves here in the night, and a lot of things are gone."

"Most of all I miss my boat," said the marine. "They took that, too!"

CHAPTER XIX

LOTS OF FUN

"Did the bad tramps take your motor boat?" asked Rose quickly, as she saw visions of the many nice rides she hoped to have in the *Spray,* as the captain's splendid boat was called, fade away.

"No, they didn't take the motor boat," answered the marine. "I take good care to lock that every night, and I fix the motor so no one not in the secret can start it. But the tramps, or whoever they were who paid us a midnight visit, took one of my best rowboats—one I use when I go fishing."

"Oh, may we go fishing?" asked Vi, who, with Laddie and the two little ones, had now come down. The thefts of the midnight visitors did not trouble her very much, it seemed.

"Yes, we'll go picnicking and fishing and

have lots of fun," Captain Ben answered. "But first I must see if any one else around here has missed anything, and we must try to catch the tramps."

"Do you think it was tramps?" Laddie wanted to know.

"Well, I can't be sure of the last," remarked Captain Ben. "But I'm pretty sure it was tramps of some sort. As I said, they generally come around at the end of the season, when cottages and bungalows are being closed. They take anything they can find. But these fellows didn't wait for us to leave."

Captain Ben had a talk with some of his neighbors, who also missed various articles from around their cottages or docks, but the captain was the only one from whom a boat had been taken.

"I guess the tramps walked around the shore from their camp in the woods," remarked Daddy Bunker. "They took what they wanted here, and elsewhere, and then they rowed off in your boat, Ben."

"I guess that was it," remarked the marine. "I should have locked up the oars, but I left one pair out, and now I wish I hadn't. But

I'll not let those tramps get away if I can help it."

"What will you do?" asked Russ.

"I'll take after 'em!" the captain said. "Now we know where they have their camp in the woods, we know where to find them."

"May I come and help you catch 'em?" begged the oldest of the six little Bunkers.

"No, indeed!" laughed his father. "Chasing after tramps isn't the same as roasting marshmallows."

"Well, I'd like to come," Russ continued wistfully. "I could stand back and throw stones at 'em, while you and Captain Ben caught 'em. Please let me come!"

But of course this could not be, and when the six little Bunkers had been taken for a walk by their mother, Mr. Bunker, Captain Ben and some other men started to search for the tramps who had taken the rowboat.

Russ, Rose and the others had lots of fun. They played in the sand, waded in the water, and, after their father and Captain Ben had come back, the captain said they might go crabbing.

"Did you get the tramps?" asked Russ, as

he saw the *Spray* come gliding up to Captain Ben's dock.

"No, we couldn't even get sight of them," was the answer. "I guess they have gone for good. Don't worry about them. I have another rowboat, though I am sorry to lose that one."

"You're losing lots of things," commented Rose. "First you lose your wrist watch and now your boat is gone."

"I'd rather have that watch back than three boats," the captain declared. "But now, little Bunkers, we'll have some fun. We'll go crabbing from the end of the pier."

Crabs were plentiful in that part of the bay near the captain's bungalow, and soon even Margy and Mun Bun were trying to catch the creatures which had such big, pinching claws. Of course Mrs. Bunker helped her two little children, but Russ and Rose and Vi and Laddie had crabbed before, and knew all about that sport.

Each of the six little Bunkers was given a string with a piece of meat or a fish head on the end. This bait was dropped into the water at the side of the pier.

Pretty soon the crabs, crawling along on the bottom or swimming half way toward the surface, saw or smelled the bait. They went up to it and grasped it in their big claws, holding fast with one, while they picked off bits of meat with the other large claw.

"Oh, I got one!" suddenly whispered Laddie. "I got one!"

"Pull up easy!" his father said. Mr. Bunker had a long-handled net. Catching crabs is not like catching fish. There is no hook for the crab to bite on and be held fast. He only holds by his claws, and if the bait is lifted too far out of the water the crab drops off. That is why Daddy Bunker had a net ready.

"Lift your string slowly," said Laddie's father, and the little boy did this. Inch by inch the string came up, and Laddie, looking down, could see the crab clinging by his claws to the chunk of meat.

"He's a big blue-clawed one!" exclaimed Laddie.

"Careful now," said Daddy Bunker. "Careful!"

He slipped the net down into the water,

working it under the crab, which was eating away at Laddie's bait, not thinking of the danger of being caught.

Suddenly Daddy Bunker swooped with the net, dipped it and raised it again from the water. Something wiggled in the net.

"Did you get him?" shouted Laddie. "Oh, did you get him?"

"I did; and he's a dandy big one!" his father answered. In the net was the great crab, clashing his blue claws together. He had let go of the meat now, and was much surprised at being disturbed at his meal in this fashion.

Laddie lifted the meat from the net by raising the string, and then Daddy Bunker turned the net upside down over a basket. Out fell the crab, scuttling into a corner of the basket.

There he sat, with his two claws held up, ready to pinch any one who might put his fingers too near him. But no one did this. Some wet seaweed was put over the crab, and Laddie tossed back into the water his bait and string, to wait for another crab. After that every one had good luck, even Mun Bun and Margy. Their mother helped them pull up their crabs off the bottom, and Daddy Bunker

scooped them into the net. Russ, Rose and Violet also caught a number of crabs, and when the basket was full they stopped fishing.

"No use catching any more than we need to make salad of," said Mother Bunker.

"I don't want any crab salad," said Mun Bun, shaking his head.

"Well, it isn't good for little boys, anyhow," said Captain Ben. "But why don't you want any?"

"I don't want to be pinched!" said Mun Bun.

"Oh, he thinks the crabs are alive, with their claws, in the salad," laughed Vi. "Why, silly, they take the crabs claws off before they eat 'em," she said.

"Well, maybe they might forget and leave one claw on, and that would pinch me if I ate some, but I'm not going to," and Mun Bun shook his head very decidedly.

The crabs clashed their claws and frothed at the mouths as they were carried in a basket up to the bungalow where Mother Bunker boiled them. Then the meat was picked out, as though the crabs were nuts, and a nice salad was made.

This was only one of the jolly days, full of

fun, that the six little Bunkers enjoyed at Captain Ben's. There seemed to be something new to do every time the sun rose. Nothing more was heard of the tramps, though the constables, or policemen, tried to find the ragged men and get back the captain's boat.

More than once Russ or Rose would wonder if that runaway boy, Tad Munson, ever reached his home in Avalon. But there was no chance to find out, though Mr. Bunker said he was going over some day and ask.

Though the days were shorter now that fall was at hand than they had been in the summer time, when the six little Bunkers were at Uncle Fred's, there was still plenty of time for fun. Sometimes Captain Ben took the whole party off on a fishing trip in his motor boat, and again they would walk through the woods, taking their lunches in boxes and baskets.

Letters came from Norah and Jerry Simms, saying that all was well at home, but no trace was found of Captain Ben's watch.

One day when it had rained so hard in the morning that the six little Bunkers had to stay in the bungalow, it cleared in the afternoon. Mrs. Bunker let the children go out to play,

telling them not to get in any boats and not to go far away from the house.

She was busy writing letters, and she was just beginning to wonder if the children were all right, when suddenly Rose came rushing in, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Oh, Mother!" cried Rose, "Laddie's in and he can't get out. Laddie's in and he can't get out, and he's being picked to pieces! You'd better come quick!"

CHAPTER XX

THE FLOOD

"Rose! what are you saying?" cried Mrs. Bunker, jumping up out of her chair and starting toward the door of the bungalow.

"You'd better come and get him out, Mother! He's in and he can't get out himself, and he's being picked all to pieces, and Mun Bun and Margy are crying and—and——"

Rose had to stop just here, as she was all out of breath.

"What has happened, Rose?" Mrs. Bunker, herself somewhat breathless, demanded. "What has Laddie fallen into? Where is he?"

"He's in—but you'd better come and get him out! He's got a stick, but it isn't much good, and he's being picked and——"

"Being *picked,* Rose? What do you mean? Who's picking him, and where is Laddie?"

cried Mrs. Bunker. "I can't go to him till you tell me where he is."

"Laddie's in the coop with the big, old rooster that lives next door," explained Rose. "And he's picking him—I mean the rooster is picking Laddie, and he can't get out—I mean Laddie can't get out, and——"

But, once again, Rose had to stop to get her breath, for she talked very fast in her excitement.

"Oh, the rooster!" Mrs Bunker hastened on. She remembered that Captain Ben had told them about a savage rooster that was part of some poultry kept by the man next door. The rooster was ugly, and would fly at every one who came near him, and, for this reason, he was usually kept shut up in the yard, while the other fowls were allowed to go outside. When the Bunkers had come to Captain Ben's to pay a late summer visit they had been warned about the rooster and told not to go near his yard, or if, by chance, he ever got out, they were to run away from him. For though roosters do not appear to be savage they have strong wings and sharp spurs and a beak, and they can harm a small child greatly.

Holding Rose by the hand, Mrs. Bunker ran toward the chicken yard of the man next door. Before she reached it she could hear a great commotion there.

A rooster was crowing and flapping his wings, and Mother Bunker could hear the voices of Laddie, Mun Bun, Margy and Violet, and Laddie seemed to be making the most noise. Russ, as it happened, was down at the dock with his father and Captain Ben, or he might have helped his little brother.

As Mrs. Bunker turned the corner and came within sight of the chicken yard she saw what was happening. Inside the wire fence, which kept the savage rooster penned up, was Laddie. Outside, as though looking at some show, were Mun Bun, Margy and Vi, and they were screaming with excitement, Vi, every now and then saying:

"Bang him with the stick, Laddie! Bang him with the stick!"

This, as his mother could see, Laddie was trying to do. The small boy had a stick, and with this he was hitting at the rooster. But the feathered creature would flap his wings, jump up in the air out of Laddie's reach and,

coming down, would try to hit Laddie with wings, spurs or beak.

Mrs. Bunker lost no time. Letting go of Rose's hand she rushed into the chicken yard through the high, wire gate. Then, flapping her skirts at the rooster, and crying "Shoo! Shoo!" Mrs. Bunker picked her little boy up in her arms, and before the surprised fowl could attack her she was safely outside and the gate was closed. The old rooster, with an angry crow, threw himself against the wire netting, but he would not get out.

Laddie, rather mussed up and with a scratch on his bare leg that was bleeding, turned around and faced his enemy as soon as his mother put him down.

"You bad old rooster you!" cried Laddie. "If you were a baseball I'd knock you over the fence!"

"Laddie, how did you come to go into the rooster's yard?" asked Mrs. Bunker, when she saw that the little fellow was not any more harmed than a few scratches.

"I went after my ball," Laddie answered. "It got knocked over into the chicken yard when we were playing, and I went after it."

"I told him not to," said Rose.

"Well, I thought I could get in and get out again before the bad old rooster saw me," went on Laddie. "So I went in. But when I wanted to come out after I got the ball, the gate wouldn't open, and then the bad old rooster came for me, and I tried to hit him with my ball stick, and I threw the ball at him, and I hit him, I guess, but he flapped his wings and he flew at me and—and——"

And then Laddie had to stop for breath, just as Rose had done.

"Dear me!" exclaimed his mother. "It's too bad, but of course you should not have gone into the chicken yard after your ball. Mr. Wendell told you not to. He would have got your ball for you. The rooster is afraid of Mr. Wendell."

"I won't go in any more," said Laddie. "And I wish Mr. Wendell would get my ball now, for it's in there."

"I'll ask him to," said Mrs. Bunker. "And now you had better come into the house and let me wash you."

"Oh, o-o-oh, look! Laddie's leg's got the nose bleed!" cried Mun Bun, pointing to the

red spot on his brother's leg. "Laddie's leg's got the nose bleed!"

"Well, I'm glad it isn't any worse," said Mrs. Bunker, as the others laughed at Mun Bun's funny remark.

Mr. Wendell, who owned the savage rooster, came over later with Laddie's ball, which he had got from the chicken yard. Mr. Wendell said he was sorry for what had happened, and added:

"I'm going to get rid of that bird! He's getting older and more saucy every day. The best place for him is in a potpie. He won't trouble you any more, Laddie." And the next day the rooster was sent away.

The six little Bunkers kept on having good times at Captain Ben's. They went out on the water in his motor boat, and sometimes in a sailboat, and on these excursions Russ, at least, being the oldest, would look long and earnestly across the waters of the bay at Grand View.

"What are you looking for?" Rose would ask him. "Are you playing pirates?"

"No," Russ would answer. "I'm just looking to see if I can find the tramps that took Captain's Ben's rowboat."

But the tramps were not found, nor did the Bunkers learn whether or not Tad Munson ever ran back home after having run away. Mrs. Bunker often said they must take a trip over to Avalon, to inquire about the strange boy, but something always seemed to happen to put off the journey. Captain Ben was always thinking of so many things for the six little Bunkers to do to have fun.

One afternoon the marine, after having taken them all for a ride in his motor boat, said:

"To-morrow, if it's a nice day, we'll go to that island I was telling you about, and we'll have a picnic."

"May we take our lunch and stay all day?" asked Rose, breaking off a song she had started to sing.

"Yes, it will be a regular picnic lunch," the captain said. "That is, if it's a fair day."

"Do you think it will rain?" asked Russ, who had taken out his knife in order to make a little jumping jack for Mun Bun.

"It might," the captain remarked. "I don't like the way the sky looks," and he gazed up at the clouds that were scuttling along

overhead. "It's about time for the usual storm we get late in the summer, but it may hold off a week or more. Anyhow, if it does come, we can have the picnic when it clears."

The six little Bunkers went to bed that night after having talked and planned for the picnic the next day. But alas for their hopes! The fears of Captain Ben proved true, and in the morning it was raining hard.

"Maybe it will clear," said Rose, as she stood at the window with her nose pressed against the glass, giving her a funny look.

"I hope it does," said Violet. "Say, Daddy, what makes the rain wet?" she asked. "Wouldn't it be nice if the rain was dry, like snow, and then we could go out without umbrellas? Wouldn't it be nice?"

"Snow is wet when it melts," her father said. "And if rain were not wet it would do no good when it fell. Don't complain. Have as much fun as you can here in the house. I don't believe it is going to clear to-day."

And it did not. It rained harder and harder, but Captain Ben knew how to provide fun for the six little Bunkers even in a storm. He had many things of interest in his bungalow,

and he knew many stories which he told the children. Every once in a while, though, he would go to the door and look out, and Mrs. Bunker saw that the captain's face was grave.

"Do you think something might happen?" she asked.

"There's a great deal more rain falling than I like to see," answered Captain Ben.

"Will it make the ocean so high it will wash us away?" asked Violet, who overheard what was said.

"No," the captain answered. "All the rain that ever fell would not make the ocean rise any higher. But back of us is a small river, and sometimes, when it rains too much, this river rises and makes a flood."

"Will it wash this bungalow away?" Russ asked.

"Oh, no, nothing like that. But it sometimes comes into my cellar," replied Captain Ben. "However, I don't believe it will this time. Only I wish it would clear up so I could take my six little Bunkers to the island on a picnic."

The six little Bunkers wished this themselves, but of course all their wishes could not

stop the rain from falling, and it pelted down all day.

Rather earlier the next morning than he was in the habit of getting up, Russ Bunker was awakened by hearing voices out in the bungalow yard under his window. He quickly jumped from bed, looked out, and what he saw surprised him. It was still raining hard, and the yard seemed to be turned into a small lake with chicken coops floating around in it. Besides the coops, there were planks and boards, and Captain Ben and other men were wading about with long rubber boots on, trying to secure the floating coops of chickens.

"Oh, Mother! Dad!" cried Russ in his excitement. "Wake up! The flood has come!"

CHAPTER XXI

AN ISLAND PICNIC

Mr. and Mrs. Bunker did not need the urging call of Russ to awaken them. They had already been up more than an hour when the little boy exclaimed so loudly about the flood. And it was as he had said. The rain had filled the little river back of the bungalow, the river had risen and made a lake of the yards and fields back of Captain Ben's home.

"What's the matter?" called Rose, who had been sleeping and dreaming of the island picnic until she heard Russ's voice. "What's happened?" she asked.

"Come and see," answered Russ.

Rose finished dressing and ran to join her brother at the window, which looked down into the yard. Soon Laddie and Vi were with them, and the four little Bunkers looked out on a curious scene. The other two little Bunkers

—Mun Bun and Margy—were still asleep in their beds, or bunks. And it was indeed curious for Rose, Russ, Vi and Laddie to see Captain Ben and some others, including Daddy Bunker now, wading about and pulling the floating chicken coops to places of safety.

"Are the chickens going for a ride in their coops?" asked Vi.

"It looks so," Russ answered. "But I guess they'd rather not go. Chickens don't like water."

"I wish that old rooster that flew at me would get soaking wet!" exclaimed Laddie.

"Anybody that's out in this rain'll get wet," observed Russ. "See it pour!"

It was, indeed, a very hard storm, but Captain Ben and his friends, with Daddy Bunker, who were helping to save the chickens of the neighbor next door, had on yellow "slickers," or oilskins, as the fishermen and sailors call them, and with their big rubber boots they were almost as dry as though under shelter.

"Will the bungalow float away?" asked Vi, as she looked at the big pond of water which not only filled Captain Ben's back yard, but also the yards of his neighbors on either side.

"No, the bungalows will not float away," said Mother Bunker, coming along just in time to hear Vi's question. Mother Bunker thought perhaps the flood might frighten the children, but they seemed to think it rather jolly than otherwise.

"It's like being on a house boat, isn't it?" said Rose.

"Oh, wouldn't that be fun!" cried Russ. "We could float all around and live here and we wouldn't care how hard it rained."

"I'm afraid Captain Ben wouldn't like to see his bungalow go floating off in the flood," said Mrs. Bunker, with a smile. "But come down to breakfast now, and then you may watch the men save the chickens. Poor things! I guess they don't know what to make of it."

"May we go out and help save 'em after we eat?" asked Laddie.

"No, indeed!" his mother told him. "You must stay in while it rains. But it may stop before the day is over."

However, the downpour showed no signs of letting up. It came down harder than ever, and when they had finished eating the children stood at the windows and looked out.

The water in the rear yard was not quite up to the back steps, but when Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker came in, after having helped save the chickens, the marine said:

"There is water in my cellar now. If it keeps on raining there will be more in. But there's nothing much down there to spoil."

"Will it wash the bungalow away?" asked Vi.

"Oh, no!" laughed the captain. "We've had floods like this before, and we never had any serious trouble. I'm only sorry that it spoils our island picnic."

"Well, we can have fun here," said Russ. "We can make believe we're on a house boat, and that we're sailing to China."

"And can't we go somewhere to get something to eat?" asked Laddie. "Maybe they won't have anything I like in China. They have tea, and I don't like that very much."

"Yes, we'll make believe sail to the North Pole, and maybe we'll see Santa Claus and he'll give us something good," laughed Rose, catching up Margy in her arms and dancing about the room.

"I want to see Santa Claus!" cried Margy.

"And I want candy!" added Mun Bun.

"Play as much as you like," said Captain Ben. "It can't rain forever and we'll have our island picnic as soon as the weather clears."

But it seemed to be going to rain all day. Inch by inch the water in the back yard crept nearer the back steps.

"I guess I'd better bring up one of my rowboats from the dock," said Captain Ben, with a laugh, as, after dinner, he looked out and saw the flood coming still higher. "Mr. Wendell will have to row around in a boat to feed his chickens, I believe."

"Oh, could I come?" begged Russ. "It'll be lots of fun to feed chickens from a rowboat."

"We don't know for sure that that is what Mr. Wendell will do," said the marine.

The children played about the bungalow as best they could until nearly supper time, when it was still raining. While Mrs. Bunker was busy with the meal, Rose and Russ went out on the back porch. The weather was not cold, and when the children saw how near the large puddle of water was in the yard, and noticed that it was not raining quite so hard now, they each thought of something at the same time.

"Let's go in wading!" exclaimed Russ and Rose together.

"We can put on our raincoats," added Russ.

"And take umbrellas," went on Rose.

Not stopping to ask their mother if they might, and seeing that Vi and Laddie, Mun Bun and Margy were playing together in a distant part of the house, Rose and her brother got on their storm clothes, took off their shoes and stockings and soon were wading about in the shallow part of the flood-pond.

"Isn't it nice?" laughed Rose, as she splashed about.

"Lots of fun," said Russ. Then, as he looked toward the far end of Captain Ben's flooded yard, Russ uttered a cry of surprise. "Look, Rose!" he called. "On that board floating down!"

"Oh, it's a cat!" cried Rose.

"And some kittens!" added Russ. "She's taking them for a ride!"

Surely enough, floating down the flooded yard on a board was a mother cat and four kittens. But they did not seem to be riding for pleasure, or having a good time. As the board boat slowly turned around and around, coming

SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY RUSS PULLED THE BOAT TOWARD HIM.

Six Little Bunkers at Captain Ben's

nearer and nearer to Russ and Rose, the mother cried as though asking the children to come and rescue her and her little family. The little kittens also cried.

"Oh, Russ!" exclaimed Rose. "The poor things! Can't we get 'em and take 'em in?"

"I guess so," Russ answered. "They're floating down this way. If I had a long stick I could poke 'em nearer to us."

"Here's a clothes stick," said Rose, taking one from the back porch. Then she and Russ waded farther out and waited for the mother cat and her kittens to come within reach.

Just about this time Mrs. Bunker, who had finished setting the table, went into the pantry, and from a window she could look out into the back yard. She saw what Russ and Rose were doing—wading in the pond with their shoes and stockings off, Rose under an umbrella and Russ in his rain coat.

"Oh, children! what are you doing?" called Mrs. Bunker.

"We're trying to save the kittens!" answered Russ. "I'll have 'em in a minute."

As he spoke he reached out with the clothes pole Rose had handed him, and he managed to

touch the board on which crouched the little family, mother and kittens all mewing now. Slowly and carefully Russ pulled the board toward him, and when it was almost within his reach the mother cat took one of the kittens up in her mouth. It was as though she knew they were going to be rescued, and as though she were getting ready for it.

"Oh, the poor little dears!" exclaimed Rose. She reached forward to lift off the other three little kittens, while Russ dropped the pole and got ready to take care of the mother cat. But Rose found that to hold three kittens she needed to let go of the umbrella, so she tossed it on the porch back of her.

Then she quickly gathered the three half-drowned kittens in her arms, while Russ took the mother cat and one kitten, which the mother cat still held in her mouth. Then, as the board floated away, the children carried their new pets into the house.

"Oh, my dears, you're all wet!" cried Mother Bunker, while Vi and Laddie and Mun Bun and Margy crowded around to look at the rescued animals.

"Well, if we hadn't gone out in the rain we

wouldn't have seen the mother cat and her little ones, and maybe they'd be drowned, so it's a good thing we went in wading," declared Russ.

His mother laughed but said nothing. The cat and kittens were carried near the warm stove and given milk, and soon they were purring contentedly.

"Something good came out of the flood, anyhow," said Captain Ben, when he saw the now happy little family.

"How do you suppose they got on the board?" asked Russ, as he rubbed the now soft and dry fur of one of the kittens.

"I presume the old cat had her family out in some barn or woodshed," answered the marine. "When the water began to rise she crawled with them up as high as she could to keep dry. But the water kept on rising and finally floated her off on the board, as though it were a boat. I don't know where they came from, but we'll keep them until some one claims them."

"I'm going to keep one forever and take it home with me!" declared Margy, who had a black kitten in her lap.

"So'm I!" added Mun Bun, who was lifting up a black and white kitten.

It rained all that night, but the sun shone and the storm was over the next day. The flood did very little real damage, aside from floating away Mr. Wendell's chicken coops and filling Captain Ben's cellar with water. And almost as quickly as it had risen the small river went down again. The ocean and bay were not changed by all the rain that had fallen. The tides rose and fell just the same.

One bright, sunny day, shortly after the flood, when the old cat and her kittens had begun to feel quite at home in the bungalow, Captain Ben came up from the dock where he and Daddy Bunker had been working on the motor boat.

"Now the *Spray* is all ready for a long trip," said the sailor. "We shall go on our island picnic to-morrow."

"Oh, what fun!" laughed the six little Bunkers.

It was a glorious day for a picnic. They were all up early and the lunches were packed in boxes and baskets.

"Are we going to take the mother cat and

her kittens?" asked Margy, when the time came for the start.

"Oh, indeed no!" said Mrs. Bunker.

"Well, how are they going to get anything to eat if we leave 'em home here all alone?" Mun Bun wanted to know.

"I'll put a saucer of milk where they can get it for their dinner, Margy," answered Captain Ben. "And we'll be home in time to feed them this evening."

That satisfied the two smaller children, and, after a last pat and rub of the purring mother and kittens, Margy and Mun Bun joined the others in the motor boat.

Over the sparkling waters of the bay at Grand View went the *Spray*. The six little Bunkers looked toward the island where they were to spend the day on a picnic, and soon they reached it.

"Can we go barefoot?" asked Vi, almost as soon as she had stepped out on the sandy beach.

"Yes. But be careful about stepping on sharp shells," her mother cautioned her.

"I'm going to take off my shoes, too!" said Mun Bun, and soon the four youngest Bunkers

were wiggling their toes on the soft, warm sand.

Then such fun as the children had! They raced about, sailed little wooden boats, built caves of sand, and threw stones in the water. Russ gathered shells for his collection, and Rose picked flowers for her dried flower collection, while Daddy and Mother Bunker and Captain Ben sat in the shade and talked or read books they had brought along.

Rose and Russ had wandered off together down a woodland path on the island, and Rose was a little ahead of her brother when he suddenly heard her calling.

"Russ, come here!" said Rose in a strange voice.

Russ hurried forward.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER THE TRAMPS

Russ saw his sister Rose standing in a little shady group of trees, looking at some sight down in a small glen, or little valley.

"What's the matter, Rose?" asked Russ.

"Hush. Not so loud," she whispered back, holding her hand up to make him keep quiet. "You'll scare 'em away if you're not careful."

"Scare who?" asked Russ.

"The tramps," Rose answered. "See, there are the ragged men down there. They're having a picnic, like us, I guess."

Russ looked and saw a group of the sort of men he had always called tramps. They were ragged and dirty, and were seated about a fire over which hung a steaming kettle.

"They're cooking just like gypsies," said Russ. "Maybe they are gypsies, Rose."

"No, they're tramps," went on the little girl.

"And I guess they are the same ones that took Captain Ben's rowboat and the other things off the dock. And maybe they're the same ones that took Mrs. Brown's jewelry."

"Oh, maybe they are!" exclaimed Russ. "What'll we do?"

"Let's go and tell daddy and mother and Captain Ben," answered Rose. "They'll know what to do."

Russ and Rose turned back on the woodland path. The ragged tramps did not appear to have seen or heard the children, and a little later the oldest of the six little Bunkers were excitedly telling the others on the island beach what they had seen.

"Tramps, eh?" exclaimed Captain Ben. "Well, now I have a chance to catch them. They can't get away from me now, as the island is too small. Can you show me where they are, Russ and Rose? Then you can come back while your father and I round them up."

"Oh, can't I help catch 'em?" pleaded Russ.

"No, indeed!" his father exclaimed, as he and Captain Ben got ready to go to where the ragged men were cooking some sort of meal in the woods.

"Wait a minute!" called Mother Bunker. "If you two men are going tramp hunting, that means I shall be left alone here with the childred. And if any of the tramps get away, and come around where we are——"

"That's so!" exclaimed Daddy Bunker. "I didn't think of that. What shall we do?" he asked Captain Ben. "It will take two of us to round up the tramps, and yet——"

Just then the whistle of a boat sounded down near the beach where the Bunker party had landed in the *Spray*. Captain Ben glanced down, and as he did so a smile and look of relief came over his face.

"This will make it easy," he said. "There's Captain Blake and some boys I know. They were in the war with me. Some of them can stay with Cousin Amy and the children, and the rest can come with us and help catch the tramps."

"I wish I'd been a soldier boy, then I could help catch tramps, too!" exclaimed Russ.

"Hello, Captain Ben! What are you doing here?" called Captain Blake, who had brought a group of boys from a warship to the island for a day's outing.

"We're having a picnic," replied Captain Ben. "And you're just in time, boys!" and he greeted the jolly sailor lads.

"Just in time for lunch, do you mean?" asked one rosy-cheeked lad, as he danced around on the sand after leaping from the motor boat.

"Yes, I guess we have some lunch left, if the six little Bunkers didn't eat it all up," went on Captain Ben.

"Six little Bunkers!" repeated Captain Blake. "That sounds like a troupe of circus performers."

"Well, they can get up a circus if they have to!" laughed Captain Ben. "But here they are," and he pointed to the six little Bunkers, and introduced Daddy and Mother Bunker as well.

"But what I meant when I said you were just in time," went on Captain Ben, "is that we've discovered a nest of tramps here on the island. I think they're the same gang that took my rowboat, and also took some things off the dock. They're down in a little glen—two of the Bunkers saw them—I want you boys to help me catch 'em!"

"Whoopee! That's what we'll do! All aboard!" cried one of the sailor boys.

"But you can't all go," went on Captain Ben. "Some of you must stay with Mrs. Bunker and the children in case the tramps scatter and some of them run this way."

"I could drive 'em away, but they won't let me!" complained Russ, who felt quite indignant that he was not to be allowed to take part in the chase.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, sonny!" said Captain Blake, with a smile. "You and I and one of the sailor boys will stay here as a sort of home guard. The others can go and catch the tramps. And we'll have an extra piece of cake, maybe, for staying at home instead of having the fun of the chase."

"Yes, you shall each have two pieces of cake," promised Mrs. Bunker.

"And I want some!" added Mun Bun, who was generally to be heard from when there was anything like cake to eat.

So it was arranged. Captain Ben, Daddy Bunker and some of the sailor boys went off over the hill, very quietly, toward the place where Rose and Russ had seen the tramps

around their camp fire. Captain Blake and a big, hearty, strong sailor boy remained behind as a guard for Mother Bunker and the six little Bunkers. Captain Blake was a jolly man, and he soon had the children laughing with his funny stories.

"Do you know any riddles?" asked Laddie, after a while.

"Well, I might think of one," said the captain. "I'll ask you this: What is the longest word in the world?"

"If I had a dictionary here maybe I could find it," said Russ.

"You don't need a dictionary for this," went on the seaman. "I think I'll have to tell you. The longest word is smiles."

"Why, that's only a little, short word," said Rose, smiling herself.

"But isn't there a mile between the first and the last letter?" Captain Blake asked. "You see, first there is a letter S. Then comes the word mile, and then there's the last S—a mile between the two, and I call that a very long word."

"Oh, how funny!" laughed Rose. "That's a good riddle."

"And I know another," said Laddie. "What is it that's got only one eye and carries a long train in it?"

"What is it that has only one eye and carries a long train in it?" repeated the captain. "Do you mean a train of cars?"

"No, I mean a long train—like that on a lady's dress," Laddie explained. "It's a needle!" he said quickly, before any one had time to guess. "A needle has one eye and when there is thread in the eye the thread makes a long train."

"Ha! Ha! That's pretty good!" laughed the captain. Then he told more stories, and the sailor with him sang some jolly sea songs and the six little Bunkers were having a fine time.

"I wonder if daddy and Captain Ben are catching the tramps," said Mrs. Bunker, after a while, when it seemed as though it was time for the searching party to return.

Suddenly there was a crackling in the bushes.

"Here comes some one now," said Russ.

The noise in the bushes grew louder, and there was the sound of several voices. Captain Blake, who had been having fun with Mun

Bun and Margy on the grass, rose to his feet and picked up a stout club. The other sailor did the same, and they stood in front of Mrs. Bunker and the children, looking in the direction of the noise.

Russ moved up as though to take his place beside the two protectors, but his mother called to him to come back to her, where Rose and the other little Bunkers were now gathered.

Then they all waited to see who should come through the bushes. Would it be Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben returning with the tramps they had caught, or the ragged men themselves, scattering and running away?

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OLD SATCHEL

"I SEE Captain Ben!" suddenly called Rose, pointing toward the bushes which could now be seen to be moving.

"I'm glad of that!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker, and Captain Blake and his sailor friend dropped the clubs they had taken up.

"Did they catch any tramps?" asked Laddie.

"I don't see any," replied Russ.

And as his father and the others of the party came into view, pushing their way through the bushes, it was noticed that they had not captured any of the ragged men.

"What's the matter?" asked Captain Blake. "Did they get away from you?"

"Yes," answered Captain Ben. "The rascals skipped out. They must have heard us coming and have run down to the beach on the

other side of the island. There the tramps piled into a boat and went away."

"What sort of boat?" asked the seaman who had come with the jolly sailors.

"It was a motor boat," answered Daddy Bunker. "But they had a rowboat also, towing behind."

"And I think it was the same rowboat they took from me," went on Captain Ben. "And I shouldn't be a bit surprised if they had taken the motor boat, also."

"Oh, they must be terribly bad men!" exclaimed Vi, in such a funny voice that every one laughed.

"They are bad," declared Captain Ben. "That's why I want to catch them. They'll be hanging around here all winter if we don't drive them away, and they'll be taking things that don't belong to them. Captain Blake, will you help me?"

"Help you in what, Captain Ben?" asked the other captain, while the six little Bunkers looked and listened.

"Will you help me catch those tramps? We can take after them in our motor boats. I saw which way they went. I believe they're head-

ing for Oyster Cove. We can round them up there. Will you come?"

"I most assuredly will!" exclaimed Captain Blake.

"And we'll come, too!" shouted the sailor boys.

"Then can't I come?" asked Russ. "I could steer a boat or throw stones or—something!"

"I'm afraid this will be no place for little boys," answered Captain Ben. "We might as well hurry," he added. "I'm sorry to end our island picnic," he remarked to Mrs. Bunker, "but we must get those tramps."

"Do you want me and the children to stay here on the island while you men go down to Oyster Cove and capture the tramps?" asked the mother of the six little Bunkers. "If you do——"

"Oh, no! I wouldn't think of that," answered Captain Ben. "As I said, I hate to spoil the picnic, but I think it will be best for you to take the children back to my bungalow. Then Captain Blake and I will go with the sailors, catch the tramps, and take away the things the ragged men stole."

"Perhaps that will be best," said Mrs.

Bunker. "We have had a good time here, and it is almost time to go back home."

There was so much excitement going on, and such a prospect of more that might happen, that the six little Bunkers did not at all mind leaving the island. They were always ready for something new, were the six little Bunkers, and this chase after the ragged tramps was decidedly something new.

"If you catch 'em will you bring 'em back for us to see?" asked Vi, as the two parties prepared to leave the island.

"No, I think we'll take them right to the lockup," answered her father. "But come now, gather up everything, and we'll start back. If we let the tramps get too far away it will be hard to catch them again."

Soon the six little Bunkers were once more in Captain Ben's boat, and on their way across the bay to the bungalow. Captain Blake and his sailor boys went at once in the direction of Oyster Cove, there to round up the tramps if possible.

"I'll come and join you as soon as I leave the six little Bunkers safe," Captain Ben called to his friend Captain Blake.

"Who'll take care of us after you and daddy go back to get the tramps?" Rose asked, as the boat neared the dock.

"There will be plenty of neighbors around," her mother answered.

Word soon spread through the little colony at Grand View that the tramps, who had stolen many things during the late summer, might soon be caught, and several men joined Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker in the motor boat that was to go to Oyster Cove.

"But there will be no danger from the tramps," remarked Mr. Wendell, the next door neighbor, whose rooster had tried to fight Laddie that time. "The tramps must know they are being chased, and they'll get as far away as they can."

"I hope they don't get so far away that daddy and Captain Ben can't catch 'em!" exclaimed Russ.

Russ, Rose and the others stood on the pier and waved their hands to Captain Ben and their father, who departed in the motor boat *Spray,* together with several volunteers who wanted to help catch the tramps. Then the six little Bunkers went up the hill to the bungalow.

They were tired after their outing on the island, and for once they did not tease their mother to provide them with some amusement.

Margy and Mun Bun found two of their dolls and were satisfied to sit down and play with them for a time. Laddie found a picture book and took it off in a corner. Vi got out her sewing basket and began work on a dress for her doll. But as she had been working on this same dress all summer, and as it was not nearly finished yet, it seemed as if her poor doll would have to go out and buy something to wear, Russ said.

Russ had brought in some wood for the fire his mother wanted to start in the kitchen stove and Rose was getting ready to help set the table. When these tasks were done Margy and Mun Bun came up to Rose and Russ who were sitting down, resting.

"You please be doctor," begged Mun Bun of Russ.

"And you be nurse. Our babies are sick," said Margy to Rose.

"What in the world do you mean?" asked Russ.

"You be doctor and bring medicine to the

dolls in a satchel," went on Margy, pulling at the sleeve of Russ. "I'll show you where the satchel is. You put medicine in, and come and be doctor."

"Oh, she wants you to get a satchel and pretend you're a doctor and bring medicine like Dr. Gage brings to our house," said Rose. "And they want me to be a nurse. We'll play with you a little while, until supper is ready, Margy," she promised her little sister.

"And Russ be doctor," begged Mun Bun.

"Yes, Russ'll be doctor," went on Rose. "Get that old valise we brought from home with us," she went on, "and make believe it has a lot of pills and medicine in it, Russ. We'll keep Mun Bun and Margy quiet while mother finishes getting supper," she whispered to her big brother.

"All right, I'll be the doctor," promised the oldest Bunker boy. "Where's the valise?"

Rose showed him where, put back in a hall closet, was an old satchel in which some odds and ends had been put the last minute for the automobile trip from home. With this in his hand, and pretending to be a doctor, Russ walked up to the playhouse Mun Bun and

Margy had made for themselves in one corner of the living room.

"Which is the sick baby?" asked Russ, just as Dr. Gage might have done. He looked at the dolls which Mun Bun and Margy had.

"They're both sick," said Margy, "and they both want a lot of medicine."

"Well, I'll give one some red pills and the other some green," said "Dr. Russ." He dropped his satchel of make-believe medicine to the floor and was about to look at Margy's doll, when Rose gave a startled cry and pointed to the old satchel.

"Look! Look!" she cried. "See what was in the old valise!"

CHAPTER XXIV

TAD'S NEWS

MARGY almost dropped her sick doll, she was so surprised at the astonishment in the voice of Rose and at the manner in which her sister pointed toward the old valise. Mun Bun, too, looked at the leather satchel on the floor, and Russ, who had dropped it, stared with wide-opened eyes at the sight which met his gaze.

"Look! Look!" went on Rose. "There it is!"

"What?" asked Margy.

"Captain Ben's watch—the gold wrist watch he lost when he was helping us pack to come here," went on Rose. "It just fell out of the old valise Russ dropped.

"Did it?" asked Russ, who was as much surprised as was Rose.

"Yes," went on Rose, "it did. As soon as

you dropped the valise that little pocket on the side opened and the watch came out. There it is!"

And there, surely enough, was Captain Ben's missing watch—the one he thought so much of because it was given to him by a soldier in France.

"What's the matter?" asked Mother Bunker, coming in from the kitchen. She had heard the cries of excitement among the children.

"Look what we found—Captain Ben's watch—it was in the old valise—it fell out when Russ dropped it—dropped the valise, I mean," answered Rose. "He was playing doctor, because Mun Bun's doll and Margy's were sick. Oh, Mother! won't Captain Ben be glad?"

"Yes, I think he will," answered Mrs. Bunker, as she picked the watch up off the floor. The timepiece was not damaged, and when Mrs. Bunker had wound it and given it a little shake, it ticked off merrily, though of course it had to be set to indicate the proper hour.

"Well, I never knew Captain Ben's watch

was in that old valise when I took it to play doctor," said Russ.

"And no one else imagined it was there," said his mother. "The watch must have slipped from Captain Ben's wrist when he was helping us pack, and it fell into the side pocket of the satchel. Then it was strapped shut and put with our luggage. We never had occasion to open the valise side pocket, and of course we never thought of looking in there. Only by accident could it have been found."

"I'm glad we found it," said Russ. "Captain Ben'll be glad, too."

There was so much excitement over finding the missing watch that all thought of playing doctor, nurse and sick dolls passed. Vi and Laddie had to hear the story all over again.

"Then the tramps didn't take Captain Ben's watch after all, did they?" asked Vi, when she and Laddie had looked several times in the side pocket of the valise, whence the watch had slid when Russ dropped the satchel.

"We never thought tramps had taken it," said her mother. "Captain Ben missed his watch long before we heard about the tramps."

Speaking of tramps naturally brought the

talk to the chase then under way, and the children were wondering whether their father, Captain Ben, Captain Blake and the others would be lucky in the pursuit. It was just getting dusk when steps were heard on the bungalow porch, and in came Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben. They looked tired and discouraged.

"Did you catch the tramps?" cried Russ eagerly.

"No," and his father shook his head. "They had too much of a start on us."

"And they got away," added Captain Ben. "We were unlucky to-day."

"But we were lucky here!" exclaimed Rose, with sparkling eyes.

"What do you mean?" asked the marine, looking from one of the six little Bunkers to the other. Something in their manner told him that the unusual had happened.

"See if you can guess!" proposed Laddie. "Make believe it's a riddle, and guess, Captain Ben."

"Hum! Let me see!" and the marine pretended to be thinking very hard. "Is it——"

"It's your watch!" burst out Mun Bun.

"We were playing sick dolls, and Russ was the doctor and he had a valise and——"

"Oh, what'd you tell him for? Why didn't you let him guess?" asked Laddie.

But the secret was out now.

"My watch! My wrist watch! Do you mean you found my watch that the French soldier gave me?" cried Captain Ben.

"Yes, here it is," and Mrs. Bunker handed it to her relative, telling him how it had been found.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Captain Ben. "I had given that up as lost forever. I should say you did have luck here, even if we were not lucky in catching the tramps."

"So they got away, did they?" asked Mother Bunker, after Captain Ben had fastened his watch on his wrist.

"Yes. In the motor boat, which they must have stolen, they were too speedy for us. Then, too, they had a good start. But we have not given up. Word has been sent to the police all around here and the men may be caught any moment. They won't bother us again, that's sure."

"I'm glad of that," said Mother Bunker.

Then they all sat down to supper and talked over what had happened during the day. There was plenty about which to talk, from the picnic early in the day, to the sighting of the tramps by Rose, the chase after them and the finding of the captain's watch. As he had promised, Captain Ben divided the five dollars reward between Rose and Russ.

But all days must come to an end, and this one finally did. The six little Bunkers went up to bed and soon were sleeping, tired out with the many adventures.

It was just after breakfast the next morning when Russ, who was bringing in some wood for the kitchen fire, heard some one coming up the front walk and looked to see who it was.

"Why—why!" Russ exclaimed. "It's Tad —Tad Munson!"

"Yes, that's who I am," was the answer. "And I've a lot of news for you. Where's your father and Captain Ben?"

"They're in the house," said Russ. "But what's the matter? What news have you to tell?"

"You wait and you'll hear!" promised Tad,

for it was, indeed, he. But he was much changed. He was clean and well dressed. Instead of old, torn shoes he had on nice, shiny ones.

Just then Captain Ben and Daddy Bunker came out on the porch. They seemed surprised at the sight of the former runaway boy.

"He's got news for us, Daddy!" cried Russ, dropping his armful of wood.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CAPTURE

"Well, Tad," said Mr. Bunker, when he saw the "runaway boy," which was the name he was often called, "it has been some time since we saw you last."

"Yes, Mr. Bunker, it has," went on Tad. "I'm sorry I caused you so much trouble."

"Oh, you didn't cause us so much trouble as you did your father," said Captain Ben. "He came here one night, very late, inquiring about you, and——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Tad. "And I'm sorry I made him so much trouble. But it's all right now, and I'm never going to run away again. That's what I came over to tell you."

"Is this the news?" asked Russ, and he began to feel a little disappointed.

"No, it isn't all the news," Tad went on. "After I ran away, and you brought me part

of the way back, I was going to take the trolley car to my home in Avalon, just as I said I would. But I got sort of scared after I went away from you. I was afraid to go home, so I didn't."

"Oh, so that's why your father came here looking for you!" exclaimed Daddy Bunker. "We often wondered if you ever did go back home."

"Yes, I went a few days after that," Tad said. "And my father was good to me, and when I told him how kind you folks were to me, he said I must come right over and thank you, and let you know I was safe at home again.

"Well, I was going to, but I kept putting it off. But at last my father and mother decided I must come, so when I got some new clothes and new shoes I decided to come, and here I am. I just came in on the trolley car."

"Did you come to tell us about your new shoes and new suit?" Rose asked.

"Oh, I have more news than that!" exclaimed Tad. "Do you want to know where to find those tramps?" he asked suddenly.

"Tramps? What do you know about the

tramps?" asked Captain Ben. "Have they been over in Avalon, too, taking things?"

"No, I don't think so," answered Tad. "But we heard, over there, about a gang of tramps being chased off an island and down toward Oyster Cove. And just now, when I was getting off the trolley car down by the railroad station, I saw a lot of tramps hiding in the bushes."

"You did?" cried Daddy Bunker. "What were they doing there?"

"Just hiding," answered Tad. "I was near enough to hear what they were saying, and they spoke about a motor boat. That's what made me think maybe they were the same tramps you chased."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised!" exclaimed Captain Ben. "This is great news, Tad. Come on!" he called to Daddy Bunker. "We'll get some policemen and round up these fellows. We'll capture them, and send them to jail. Then maybe I'll get back my rowboat they took, and if we find the motor boat we can give that back to whoever owns it."

"Maybe the tramps are hiding in the bushes to steal a train of cars," suggested Laddie.

"They couldn't carry off a train of cars, that's sure," said Captain Ben, with a laugh. "Probably they're hiding there so they can get aboard a freight train when one stops. I guess they want to get away from here, and they think a freight train will take them away so they won't be captured. But we'll get after them. Just where did you see the ragged men, Tad?"

The former runaway boy told, and Captain Ben called the police station on the telephone and asked that two or three policemen be sent to his bungalow. From there the capture party could start for the tramps' hiding place in the bushes by the railroad.

"I'll go along with you and show you the place," Tad offered.

The policemen soon arrived at Captain Ben's bungalow, and then he and Daddy Bunker set out, with Tad to lead the way to where the ragged men were hiding.

"Oh, Mother, can't we go and see the tramps run?" begged Rose.

"Yes!" added Russ. "They won't chase us with the policemen there to make 'em be good! Let's go!"

"Well, we'll go and look on from a distance," said Mrs. Bunker. So, with the six little Bunkers in charge she started for the railroad.

It was all over in a little while. Daddy Bunker, Captain Ben, and the police officers silently made their way to the place where the ragged men were hiding. They surrounded it, so the tramps could not get away, and soon the vagrants were all captured. They did not fight at all, for they seemed to be cowards.

One by one they were led out, pushed into a wagon and taken to jail. Of course the six little Bunkers did not go near the jail. But they had seen the tramps caught and this was enough for them. Tad was warmly thanked by Captain Ben, Daddy Bunker and others for telling where the troublesome men might be caught.

"Did you get your rowboat?" asked Russ of Captain Ben, when the marine came back after the tramps were locked up.

"They didn't exactly have it with them," laughed Captain Ben, "but I made them tell me where it was hidden. And the motor boat is there also. It was stolen from a friend of mine. He'll be glad to get it back—as glad as

I am to get my rowboat and my wrist watch—only, of course, the tramps didn't have that. But the ragged men will not trouble any one for a long time, now."

"Did any of them have Mrs. Brown's jewelry?" asked Mother Bunker.

"Not as far as we could learn," her husband answered. "These tramps said they were never near the Brown place."

"That's too bad. I'm sorry, I mean, that Mrs. Brown won't get back her rings and things," Mother Bunker went on. "But I'm glad these men have been captured. Now we don't need to worry about them, for the children have been a little frightened, I think."

While it may have been true that these particular tramps were not the ones that robbed Mrs. Brown, yet it was some like them, as the Bunkers learned later. For another gang of ragged men were arrested not far from Grand View, and some of these had a few of the trinkets taken from the farmhouse. These were given back to Mrs. Brown, and, later still, more of her jewelry was recovered from other tramps, so that most of her ornaments were restored.

As for Tad, he seemed to have got all over his runaway habits. He admitted he had been a very foolish little boy, and said he never was going to do anything like that again. Often after the tramps had been caught and sent away, Tad came over to play with the six little Bunkers. One day they had quite an adventure.

Back of Captain Ben's bungalow was a barn. That is, it had been a barn at one time, but after Captain Ben bought the place, and had an automobile in place of a horse, he did not use much of the stable, needing only room enough for his car. But the barn made a fine place for the six little Bunkers to play, and one afternoon, when Tad had called, Russ said:

"Let's go out to the barn and have some fun!"

"All right!" Tad agreed.

Rose had gone for a walk with her mother and Margy, but Mun Bun and Laddie remained behind to play with Russ and Tad. Daddy Bunker and Captain Ben had gone fishing in the motor boat, and they went out quite a distance in the bay.

"Let's play hide and go seek!" proposed

Tad, and this was agreed to. It was Tad's turn to close his eyes and give the others a chance to slip into various hiding places so Tad could not find them after he had opened his eyes.

"Ready or not I'm coming!" cried Tad, when he had counted up to five hundred, by fives.

"Wait a minute. I isn't hided yet!" cried Mun Bun, and Laddie, who had picked out a good place behind a pile of boards on the first floor of the old barn, saw his little brother going up the stairs that led to a loft over the place where the horses used to be stabled.

"Don't fall, Mun Bun!" called Laddie in a whisper.

"I won't!" answered the little fellow.

"I'll count a hundred more," offered Tad, and this time, when he called "ready or not I'm coming," no one objected. They were all well hidden.

When Tad went away from "home," to look for Russ and the others, Laddie managed to slip in "free," so he did not have to be "it." Russ also tried it, but he was not so lucky, and he was "spied" by Tad, and it was Russ's turn to blind his eyes next.

"Where's Mun Bun?" asked Russ, as Tad beat him to the "home."

"He went up there," and Laddie pointed to the stairs.

"Oh, he oughtn't go up there!" exclaimed Russ. "He might fall. Come on down, Mun Bun," he called.

"All right," was the answer, faint and far away. There was the sound of footsteps on the loft floor overhead and then suddenly the noise of a fall, and the voice of Mun Bun burst out crying.

"Oh, I falled! I falled!" wailed the little fellow. "I falled down a hole, and I can't get out!"

At the same time there was the sound of shoes kicking on wood, and the sound came from one of the mangers, or the place in the old horse stalls where the animals were given their feed.

"He must have fallen down through the place where they put the hay!" cried Russ, and he and Tad hurried to the stall. Just as they reached it Mun Bun stood up in the manger, which was like a long, narrow box. He was covered with wisps of hay, and he was crying,

but a quick look showed that he was not hurt.

"What happened?" asked Russ, as he lifted his little brother down out of the manger.

"Oh, I was hiding upstairs, and I walked across the floor, and then I falled down a hole, and I thought I couldn't get out, but I did," said Mun Bun.

"I see how it happened," remarked Tad. "There's a hole cut through the floor upstairs, and a sort of chute that comes down into the horse stall manger. They used to shove hay down that chute, and there must have been some still stuck in it. Mun Bun fell down the hole, and he wasn't hurt on account of the hay."

So, that was how it had happened. Mun Bun had stepped into the hay chute, and, there being a wad of old fodder still in it, he had been dropped down gently, almost as though down a dumb waiter shaft, into the manger below.

"Well, you didn't find me, anyhow, I comed down myself," said Mun Bun when he had stopped crying and had been brushed off by Russ and Tad.

Then the boys played hide and seek a little

longer, but Mun Bun did not again go up into the loft of the barn to play.

When the game was over they went back to the house. Mun Bun said he was hungry, and Russ admitted that he, too, could eat some bread and jam.

"If mother's there she'll give us some," he said to Tad. "But if she isn't we can get it ourselves."

However, Mrs. Bunker had returned from her walk with Rose, Margy and Vi, and she gave the boys and girls, including the visitor, some generous slices of bread, spread thick with raspberry jam which she had made from berries the children picked on Captain Ben's place.

Just as the six little Bunkers finished this late afternoon lunch, there was a shouting down at the dock. At first Mrs. Bunker thought something had happened, but when she saw her husband and Captain Ben getting out of the motor boat, holding up long strings of fish they had caught, she knew the reason for the joyful noise.

"Oh, what dandy fish!" cried Russ. "I wish I could catch some!"

"We'll take you along next time," promised his father.

Laddie, who had gone to the boat to look in and see if any more fish were there, suddenly uttered a cry of pain.

"Oh, did you get stuck on a hook?" exclaimed his mother.

"No, but a big crab bit me!" cried Laddie, and he danced around with a crab clinging to his finger until his father took off the pinching creature.

"This crab took told of the bait on my hook," explained Mr. Bunker, "and he clung on until I lifted him into the boat. I forgot he was there. Never mind, Laddie, he didn't make your finger bleed." For the crab had taken hold of the little boy's finger at a thick part, and no blood was drawn.

The six little Bunkers looked at the fish their father and Captain Ben had caught, and a little later some of the fish were fried for supper.

"Oh, this is the nicest place we were ever at," said Rose with a happy little song, when the time came for Tad to take the trolley car back to Avalon.

"I wish we could always have two vacations every year," remarked Russ. "I want to make another boat before we go back home."

"And I want to think of another riddle," Laddie exclaimed.

"When are we going back? Will school open soon? Can we come here again? What are we going to do to-morrow?" asked Vi.

"Oh, what a lot of questions!" laughed her mother. "We are not going back right away. We shall still have some fun at Captain Ben's."

And so we will leave the six Little Bunkers, hoping to meet them again amid new scenes.

THE END

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